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THE WATCH ON THE MAAS 9 NOV 44 - 8 FEB 45

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by oee for DHist NDHQDate: 25 Mar 47 **NOV 26 1986**The Watch on the Maas 9 Nov 44 - 8 Feb 45

1. The present report is a detailed account of the operations of Canadian Forces in North-west Europe from 9 Nov 44 to 8 Feb 45. During this period First Cdn Army, deployed on the left flank of 21 Army Group, was charged with the responsibility for the security of two vitally important sectors of the Allied Front: the Nijmegen bridgehead and the long line of the River Maas from Middelaar to the sea. In these positions it was committed to a defence which, in the definition of the Army Commander, was to be "temporary", "aggressive", and a "prelude to offensive action". (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 1, Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45). "Offensive-defence" is thus the principal theme of this report. The narrator has followed the course of events from 9 Nov 44, when the operations which resulted in the clearing of the Scheldt Estuary and the north-eastern approaches to Antwerp (Preliminary Report No. 154) came to an end, to the beginning of Operation "VERITABLE" (Preliminary Report No. 155) on 8 Feb 45.

2. The primary source material from which this report has been compiled will be found in the Directives of the C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, the Despatches and Directives of the G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, the War Diaries of Main H.Q. First Cdn Army, and of 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps. The war diaries of lower formations and units have also been consulted, but solely for the purpose of obtaining detailed accounts of specific actions.

ALLIED AND ENEMY DISPOSITIONS, 9 NOV 44

3. By 9 Nov 44 the Allied Armies in the West were deployed along a front which, from the Swiss frontier in the south, extended north through the western foothills of the Vosges, along the valley of the Moselle between the enemy-held fortress cities of Metz and Trier, thence along the eastern frontiers of Luxembourg and Belgium, through the Dutch provinces of Limburg and North Brabant to Arnhem on the Neder-Rijn, and west from Arnhem along the Waal and the main course of the Maas to the port of Westkapelle on the north-west coast of Walcheren. The southern sector of this tremendous front was held by 6 Army Group with First French Army on the right, at the entrance to the Belfort Gap, and Seventh U.S. Army on the left, based on St Die and Luneville. In the centre, 12 Army Group was responsible for a great segment of the front extending from north of Luneville in the south to the upper reaches of the Maas in the north. Within 12 Army Group, Third U.S. Army was deployed in the right flank sector, between Nancy and Thionville, First U.S. Army in the centre, in the eastern Ardennes, and Ninth U.S. Army on the left, in the Aachen sector and salient. The long left flank of the Allied Armies was held by 21 Army Group, in which both Second Brit and First Cdn Armies were then in the process of re-grouping⁴.

⁴ See Map at Appx "B".

4. In the central sector of the front, the Third U.S. Army was to open a new phase of Allied operations on 8 Nov with the launching of a major attack against the Metz salient. Within nine days five additional Allied armies were also to take the offensive. Thus, by 17 Nov, six of the seven Allied armies were to be committed to battle in a concerted effort to win a decision in the west before the final onset of winter. (War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee Weekly Resumé, Nos. 271-273, November 1944)

5. Against the tremendous weight of this attack, and against the possible eruption of the Allied left flank along the Maas, the German C.-in-C. West, Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, had marshalled a nominal 64 divisions in two army groups. In the south, Army Group "G" had deployed Nineteenth Army and Fifth Panzer Army along the line of the Vosges, and First Army in the Saarland forward of the Siegfried Line. To the north, Army Group "B" controlled the Seventh Army, First Para Army, and the Fifteenth Army. The latter, severely mauled in the fighting for the approaches to Antwerp, was in the process of re-organizing following its withdrawal across the Hollandsch Diep. Seventh Army and First Para Army, holding the sector between Luxembourg and Nijmegen, were jointly responsible for the defence of the approaches to the Ruhr. In this sector, Seventh Army, on the left, maintained its defence line well to the west of the Siegfried defences, in the plateaux of the Hunsruck and Eiffel. On the right, First Para Army defended the upper reaches of the Maas, the Reichswald area with its northern extension of the Siegfried Line, and was, in addition, responsible for containing the Arnhem - Nijmegen bridgehead. (S.H.A.E.F. Weekly Intelligence Summary Nos. 34-35, November 1944)

6. The re-grouping of 21 Army Group at this juncture was designed to provide for the extension of the offensive front opened by the Third U.S. Army attack on 8 Nov to the eastern face of the Allied left flank. The method to be employed was

- (a) by assuming responsibility for an important segment of the Ninth Army front, to enable 12 Army Group to concentrate its forces for an offensive in the AACHEN area, and
- (b) by concentrating the weight of Second Brit and First Cdn Armies along the upper reaches of the MAAS in the NIJMEGEN bridgehead, to develop offensive operations to conform with the eastward advance of 12 Army Group.

(G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
file 1-0: Directive M-534, from
C.-in-C., 21 Army Gp, 2 Nov 44)

The immediate objective of both Allied formations was the west bank of the Rhine, the possession of which was essential to a larger purpose envisaged by Field-Marshal Montgomery in September: "The objective and the prize", he stated, "is the Ruhr; its capture will mean the beginning of the end for Germany." (Ibid, Directive M-527, 27 Sep 44)

7. The detailed plan for this operation was laid down by the C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, on 2 Nov 44, as follows:

- (a) Second British Army to release 7 U.S. Armd Div to Ninth U.S. Army by 10 Nov, and by

12 Nov to open an attack against the enemy pocket west of the Maas in the area of VENLO; by 15 Nov to take over the left flank sector of Ninth U.S. Army as far south as excl GEILINKIRCHEN, and from that date to be prepared to develop offensive operations to conform with the eastward advance of Ninth U.S. Army;

(b) First Cdn Army, to release 104 U.S. Div to 12 Army Group on 5. Nov and

(i) with 1 Brit Corps to hold the line of the MAAS from MAREN to the sea "with the minimum strength necessary" while "maintaining a reserve of mobile and armoured troops in suitable positions to deal with any enemy attempt to cross the river", and, by 10 Nov,

(ii) with 2 Cdn Corps to relieve 30 Corps of Second British Army in the NIJMEGEN bridgehead and on the upper line of the MAAS from MIDDELAAR to MAREN, and

(iii) to be prepared to release 82 and 101 U.S. Airborne Divs to the Allied Airborne Army during the period 15 to 25 Nov.

(Ibid, Directive M-534)

In addition to the tasks assigned to Second Brit Army, both Army H.Q. were also "to study the possibilities of, and to prepare plans for, offensive operations:

(a) south-eastwards from the NIJMEGEN area, between the RHINE and the MEUSE, (and)

(b) northwards across the NEDER RIJN, to secure the high ground between ARNHEM and APELDOORN with a bridgehead over the IJSSEL RIVER",

either of which "might become a sound proposition at short notice..." For the present, however, the first task of the Army Group was "to complete the operations designed to open the port of ANTWERP and to drive the enemy to the north of the River MAAS in south-west HOLLAND". (Ibid)

8. The implementation of the C.-in-C.'s plan was not long delayed. With the fall of Willemstad and the surrender of the German 70th Inf Div at Middelburg on 7 Nov, and with the elimination of the Moerdijk bridgehead on 8 Nov, enemy resistance south of the Maas and on the Island of Walcheren came to an end. Meanwhile the reorganization of the Army and Corps sectors and the first stage of the regrouping ordered by the C.-in-C. were rapidly nearing completion. On the morning of 8 Nov 1 Brit Corps relieved 12 Corps of Second Brit Army, thus extending its sector east to the confluence of the Rivers Maas and Waal at Maren (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 100, Boundary Instr No. 20, 6 Nov 44; and November 1944: Appx 28, Ops Log, 8 Nov 44, Serial 14), and at 1200 hours on 9 Nov 44 2 Cdn Corps relieved 30 Corps in the Middelaar - Maren sector and in the Nijmegen bridgehead. (Ibid, November 1944: Appx 32, Ops Log, 9 Nov 44,

Serial 52). At the same time the boundary between First Cdn and Second Brit Armies was altered to run from Arendonck in Belgium, across the Belgo - Dutch frontier to Rousel, thence along the line Hilvarenbeek - Middlebeers - Oirshot - Bost - St Oedenrode - St Hubert and Haps, to Middelaar. (Ibid, February 1945: Appx 100, First Cdn Army Instr No. 21, 7 Nov 44)

9. With these developments, First Cdn Army assumed a dual responsibility:

- (a) for the defence of a front which extended from its eastern extremity at MIDDELAAR, on the east bank of the MAAS, for some 15 miles north to the south bank of the River WAAL, thence through the island area between the NEDER RIJN and the WAAL, along the perimeter of the NIJMEGEN bridgehead, and west along the WAAL and the main course of the MAAS to the west coast of WALCHEREN at WESTKAPELLE; and
- (b) for the military government of that part of the liberated Netherlands which lay between this line and the new inter-army boundary.

FIRST CDN ARMY AREA

10. The new army area extended over roughly the southern quarter of the Netherlands and contained within its boundaries some twenty percent of the Dutch population^v. It was divided into three provincial and three geographical zones. To the north the country between the Rivers Waal and Neder Rijn is a part of the flood plain of the Rhine tributaries and the western Maas. Entering Holland at Lobith, the Rhine divides a short distance downstream at Pannerden. Here the Neder-Rijn, carrying one-third of the volume of the main stream, flows north, while the Waal continues the course of the great river westwards. At Westervoort, above Arnhem, the Neder-Rijn also divides, its northern branch, the Ijssel, flowing north-west to empty into the Ijssel Meer. The Waal at Gorinchem turns into the old course of the Maas, and from Gorinchem to the Hollandsche Diep is known as the Merwede. Both rivers - save for the stretch of the Neder-Rijn between Arnhem and Wageningen, where the low hills of Gelderland dominate its northern bank - flow between massive dykes in beds above the level of the intervening plain. This district - known locally as the Over-Betuwe - is a country of flat orchard-polders traversed from east to west by the small river De Linge. Road and rail communications run north from Nijmegen to Arnhem, but from east to west only minor roads and farm tracks thread through the polder country. The few small towns, market centres for the local fruit industry, are concentrated in the eastern half of the area. Occasional willow or alder plantations along the river banks and amongst the polders vary the monotony of the landscape. Arnhem (90,500) and Nijmegen (95,000) occupy commanding positions overlooking the exits of the Betuwe from the north and south.

11. South of Nijmegen, between the Maas and the Waal, are the districts of Rijk Van Nijmegen and Maas en Waal. The former is a sandy, wooded area crossed by the main road and rail communications from the coal province of Limburg and the industrial area of central Brabant to north Holland. South-east

* The source of material for paras 10-16 inclusive will be found in Geographical Handbook Holland BR 549, October 1944.

of Nijmegen, from Mook to Groesbeek and Beek, the eastern flank of a low range of wooded hills faces the Reichswald and the German border. The Maas en Waal, west of the Maas-Waal canal between Mook and Weurt, is a continuation of the low-lying, artificially-drained polders of the Betuwe. These three districts between the Maas and the Neder-Rijn are part of the province of Gelderland.

12. South of the western Maas the province of North Brabant extends westwards from the German frontier in the east, to a line of dunes and sand bluffs which overlook the East Scheldt beyond Bergen-op-Zoom. Within these boundaries is a sandy plain crossed by important canals and by the small alluvial valleys of the northward flowing Donge, Dommel, and Aa. On its eastern border, the larger valley of the Maas merges at Grave with the Rhenish flood-plain. From Maasbracht, in Limburg, to Grave, the walls of the river valley reach an average height of some 50 feet, the right bank being slightly higher than the left. To the west of the Maas valley, and extending into Limburg, is the desolate area of swamp lands and peat bogs called De Peel. The remainder of the plain includes the districts of the Meirij Van 's Hertogenbosch and the Baronie Van Breda and is a sandy tract in which farmlands are interspersed with occasional patches of heath, woodlands, highmoor bogs and meres.

13. Two distinct town-belts cross North Brabant from west to east. The first, and less important - Bergen-op-Zoom, Roosendaal, Oosterhout, The Langstraat, 's Hertogenbosch, Oss, and Grave - marks the northern limit of the sandy plain. North of this belt, the narrow strip of marsh land separating the towns from the river dyke is the southern limit of the flood plain. Forward of the first town-belt, a line of dyke villages extends downstream from Grave, through Rayenstein, Lith, Maren, Empel, and Bokhoven, to the old-walled town of Heusden. The Langstraat, a 24-mile strip of nearly continuous settlement between 's Hertogenbosch and Geertruidenberg, is the principal centre of the boot and shoe industry in Holland. The more important belt of towns begins at Breda, an historic market and fortress city, and crosses the central portion of the province through Tilburg (97,000), the heart of the Dutch woollen industry, and Eindhoven (113,000), with its great electrical apparatus factories, through Helmond to Venlo.

14. With the exception of one main west-east highway, Bergen-op-Zoom - Roosendaal - Breda - Tilburg - 's Hertogenbosch - Grave - Nijmegen, all major lines of communication run from south to north across the province. Along its eastern boundary, road and rail lines connect Venlo and the Limburg coal fields with Nijmegen. At 's Hertogenbosch, roads from Eindhoven and Tilburg converge to cross the Maas near Hedel, and continue through Zalt Bommel, on the Waal, to Utrecht. Further to the west, Breda is the principal traffic hub for the road and rail crossings at Hoerdijk which lead north to Rotterdam. North-east of Breda a further road crossing near Geertruidenberg leads to Gorinchem and Utrecht. Much of the heavy traffic through the province, especially the coal traffic north from Limburg, is provided for by the main canals.

15. To the west and south-west of North Brabant is the small coastal province of Zeeland, which includes the peninsula of St Philipsland, the islands of Schouwen-Duiveland, Tholen, North-Beveland, and Walcheren, the isthmus and peninsula of South-Beveland, and the West Scheldt district of Zeeland -

Flandres, and has an area of 690 square miles, a population of some 250,000. Middelburg (18,000), on the island of Walcheren, is the capital. The most important town, however, is the packet port of Flushing (21,700). A single road and railway line, 26 miles in length, runs west from the mainland, south of Bergen-op-Zoom, through South-Beveland to the market town of Goes (6,900), and across the causeway over the Sloe, the channel separating South-Beveland and Walcheren, to Middelburg and Flushing. The South-Beveland Canal (Hansweert - Wemeldinge) provides the principal communication between the west and the east Scheldt, while on Walcheren, the shallow Walcheren Canal connects Flushing and Middelburg with Veere, a small port on the north coast of the island. The Veeregat and the small, tortuous channels of the Zuidbuit and the Zandkreek separate Walcheren and South-Beveland from the island of North-Beveland, a small polder formation eight and a half miles from west to east, with a coast line of about 20 miles. On the north coast of the East Scheldt is the island of Tholen, which is separated from the mainland above Bergen-op-Zoom by the extremely narrow Eedracht.

16. Geographically the province of Zeeland is a part of the general Netherlands coastal zone. Seldom exceeding a height of ten feet above mean flood level, the land is almost entirely in old and irregular polders which are bounded by internal dykes and crossed by innumerable drainage ditches. The coasts are normally dyked, but to the west and north-west of Walcheren and at the north-west corner of North-Beveland, lines of sand dunes protect the low-lying polders from the sea. Off the mainland coast below Bergen-op-Zoom, and the coastline of Tholen, wide mud flats effectively narrow the channels of the East Scheldt and the Mastgat. On the south coast of Walcheren, groyne-protected beaches lie between the internal dykes and the sea.

17. The new Army area was the principal arena in which the northern group of Allied armies had fought since 14 Sep, when First U.S. Army liberated Maastricht and the greater part of the mining district of southern Limburg. Three days later Second Brit Army, thrusting north through Eindhoven, reached Veghel, then fought on to Nijmegen and across the Betuwe to the Neder-Rijn at Arnhem. The liberation of the central sector from the sea at Bergen-op-Zoom through Roosendaal, Breda, and Tilburg to 's Hertogenbosch was accomplished by 1 Brit Corps of First Cdn Army and 8 and 12 Corps of Second Brit Army between 20 Oct and 9 Nov. To the west, in Zeeland-Flandres, heavy fighting began on 6 Oct, with the opening of the 2 Cdn Corps operation to clear the West Scheldt, and continued until the surrender of the last German forces south of the estuary on 3 Nov. The Island of Walcheren - largely flooded since 3 Oct, when a massive attack by Bomber Command breached the sea-dykes - was invaded on 1 Nov and speedily overrun. The last resistance on the island was overcome on 8 Nov. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/1 Docket II: Minutes of Morning Joint Conference, 9 Nov 44, Serial 1)

18. In each of the three provinces the process of liberation had involved both extensive damage to property, utilities and services, and an almost complete paralysis of local economy.^N The "old town" at Nijmegen, Eindhoven, the eastern suburbs of 's Hertogenbosch, and portions of Steinbergen and Bergen-op-

^N For sources for paras 18-21 see: SHAEF Weekly C.A. Summaries; the SHAEF G-5 Division publication "Relief for the Netherlands"; and W.Ds., H.Q. First Cdn Army and 2 Cdn Corps Civil Affairs for November, December 1944 and January 1945.

Zoom were more or less severely damaged; the small towns of Klundert and Standaardbuiten from 50 to 90 percent destroyed. Many another was superficially damaged, while the settlements of the Betuwe, the Maas villages, and the thickly populated Langstraat were still exposed to danger. The rural areas, too, had suffered, and in many districts there had been widespread destruction of farm buildings, livestock and crops.

19. Far more serious, however, was the almost universal destruction of road and rail bridges, the blocking of canals, and the destruction of or damage to the intricate system of locks. As the retreating enemy had seized all available vehicles, this situation involved the complete disruption of normal transport and internal distributive services. Thus, while food stuffs were dangerously low throughout the zone, the comparative plenty in a few districts could not be made readily available to the more needy. Further, the distribution of the considerable food stocks assembled by the Allied armies against the liberation was similarly impeded, and the daily ration fell from the average of 1,700 calories maintained during the last months of the German occupation to less than 1,000 for the first month of the liberation. The second most important shortage was that of coal - a fact of particular significance in a country which depended so largely on coal as the principal source of its electricity, and on its generating plants (many of which had been severely damaged or, as with the important station at Geertruidenberg, completely destroyed) to maintain much of its industrial plants as well as its lighting, water, sanitation, and flood control systems. To aggravate this situation, the enemy's hold on the Roermond area deprived all three provinces of their normal supplies of gas.

20. Thus far flooding had not been particularly serious, save in Zeeland. The Betuwe, however, and the wet polders of the Maas between Engelen and Geertruidenberg were threatened, the former by the possibility of the enemy breaching the dykes of the Nordensche Canal on Arnhem "island", the latter both by the danger of enemy action against the river walls and by the existing dislocation of the flood control. In Zeeland it was estimated that eight months would be required to drain the Island of Tholen, while on Walcheren, where bombing had resulted in four one-quarter to one-half mile breaches in the dykes - one each at Westkapelle and Veere, and two in the immediate vicinity of Flushing - 80 percent of the land surface of the island was under water. The normal population of the island - some 68,000 - had taken refuge in Middelburg, in the eight or ten villages centred on a single point of high ground near Flushing, and in the dune country along the north and north-west coasts. In the latter area there were also some four to six thousand cattle; Middelburg had not been badly damaged, but its normal population of 18,000 had been increased by the influx of refugees to nearly 42,000. At Flushing, both town and port had been partially destroyed, and only some 3,000 of a population of 20,000 remained in the area. Electric services throughout the island and in South Beveland were almost non-existent, gas pipes were flooded, and both water and sanitation systems disrupted. Bridges and canal locks had been destroyed and whole agricultural districts had suffered heavily. It was reported some months later that in Zeeland some 40 percent of the horses, 25 percent of the cows and 40 percent of the young cattle had been drowned in the floods, and that 15 percent of all farm buildings had been destroyed and another 25 percent damaged.

21. To the serious problems created by material damage in liberated Holland were added those of morale and public health. Inadequate nutrition and endemic illnesses - the spreading of which had been facilitated by overcrowding, mass evacuations, and the dislocation of water and sewage systems - had had their effect in undermining the health of the two million people in the zone, while the sudden release of emotional strain which followed the liberation had left them exhausted and apathetic. In a political sense, the vitality of the country appeared to be concentrated in the Resistance Movement. Economically, the Black Market alone seemed to flourish, thriving on the dearth of consumer goods of every description and the relative abundance of currency in circulation. Nowhere was there political unrest of consequence, but some friction made itself apparent in the relations between the various resistance groups, the regular police, and the officials of the emigre government.

22. The tremendous problems of relief, rehabilitation and administration in the new army zone devolved principally upon the Civil Affairs organization, which formally assumed these responsibilities in both corps sectors on 11 Nov 44. (W.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, Civil Affairs, November 1944: Op Instr No. 4, 11 Nov 44)

REGROUPING AND FUTURE PLANS

23. With Civil Affairs installed in the two corps sectors, First Cdn Army was free to concentrate upon the organization of the "offensive-defence" of its new area. The terms of the C.-in-C.'s directive of 2 Nov had been communicated to the General Officers Commanding 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps by the Acting Army Commander, Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., on 6 Nov. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, November 1944: Directive of A/G.O.C.-in-C., 6 Nov 44). In his directive, General Simonds also specified the grouping which was to have effect from 9 Nov. 2 Cdn Corps which, during General Crerar's illness, had been commanded by Maj-Gen C. Foulkes, was to have under command in addition to 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, 2 Cdn Armd Bde, and 2 Cdn A.G.R.A., 50 (N) Inf and 101 U.S. Airborne Divs and 12 K.R.R.C. (Mot) Bn from 30 Corps, and 4 S.S. Bde. The latter, then under direct army command for Operation "INFATUATE", was to be made available by 12 Nov. 101 U.S. Airborne Div was to be relieved either by 49 (W.R.) or 51 (H) Div as soon as one or the other could be released from Second Brit Army. To 1 Brit Corps, commanded by Lt-Gen Sir John Crocker, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., were allotted 1 Pol Armd Div, 34 Brit Tk Bde, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 52 (L) Inf Div - from under command First Cdn Army on the completion of "INFATUATE" - and Royal Netherlands Bde, which, with four independent Dutch battalions, was to come under command from Second Brit Army on 8 Nov. 7 Brit Armd Div, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div, and the elements of 51 (H) Div then under the corps command were to be released to Second Brit Army between 8 and 10 Nov.

24. 4 Cdn Armd Div, under command of 1 Brit Corps, was to be made available to come into army reserve as soon as 52 (L) Inf Div had completed its commitments on Walcheren. 1 Czsk Indep Armd Bde (with under command 7 R. Tks and 107 Brit A.A. Bde) and 74 Brit A.A. Bde were to continue under army command. (Ibid). The former was then employed as a containing force in front of Dunkirk, while the latter was concentrated in the Antwerp area.

25. The internal organization of the 2 Cdn Corps area began on 9 Nov with the relief by 2 Cdn Inf Div of 43 (Wessex) Div in the sector Middelaar - Groesbeek, and was completed on 12 Nov when command of the sector to the south and south-east of Nijmegen passed from 82 U.S. Airborne to 3 Cdn Inf Divs. 50 (N) Div continued to hold the eastern portion of the Nijmegen salient in the Betuwe, 101 U.S. Airborne Div the western portion. Responsibility for the "Western Approaches" of the bridgehead passed from 8 Brit Armd Bde Gp to 2 Cdn Armd Bde Gp (an "ad hoc" force which from 12 Nov included 8 Cdn Recce Regt, 10 Cdn Armd Regt and 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.) on 11 Nov, and on the same day 7 Cdn Recce Regt took over the local defence of the Nijmegen bridges. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, November 1944: Appx 3, Ops Log, 9-12 Nov 44)

26. Meanwhile, the moves of H.Q. 30 Corps, 8 Brit Armd Bde, the Gds Armd and 43 (Wessex) Inf Divs into the Second Brit Army area were well advanced. Both the take-over by 2 Cdn Corps and the outward move of 30 Corps were accompanied by a strict wireless silence in accordance with the plans prepared for Operation "TROLLEYCAR" - a deception scheme devised to conceal (a) the actual move of 30 Corps, and (b) the concentration of Second Army against its forthcoming attack towards the Maas in the Venlo area. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 124, Op "TROLLEYCAR")

27. In the 1 Brit Corps area the enemy's stubborn defence of the Moordijk bridgehead acted to delay the internal organization of the corps area. On 9 Nov the right sector, from the inter-corps boundary at Maren to Raamsdonk, was held by 11 H. and 7 Brit Armd Div; the centre, from Raamsdonk to the canal mouth north of Zevenbergen, by 1 Pol Armd Div. In the left sector, in the coastal zone from the left boundary of 1 Pol Armd Div west to include the island of Tholen, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt had relieved 49 (W.R.) Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs on 18 Nov. 34 Brit Tk Bde, in corps reserve, occupied the Etten area mid-way between Rosendaal and Breda. On 10 Nov 4 Cdn Armd Div moved into the line to relieve 7 Brit Armd Div and 11 H., while the latter concentrated in preparation for their return to Second Army. (Ibid, November 1944: Appx 100, 1 Brit Corps Op Instr No. 18, 7 Nov 44). 52 (L) Div and 4 S.S. Bde (with under command two independent Dutch battalions) were then responsible for the defence of Walcheren, the two Bevelands, and the south bank of the Scheldt in Zeeland-Flandres, but on 11 Nov this responsibility was delegated to 1 Brit Corps. (Ibid, Appx 24 and 33, First Cdn Army Op Instrs Nos. 43 and 45)

28. The foregoing deployment was ordered by the G.O.C., 1 Brit Corps, in operation instructions of 7 and 10 Nov, in which he also established the policy which was to govern the defence of the corps sector. On the front of the Maas and the Hollandsch Diep the object was "to ensure that no enemy patrols, Dutch refugees, or agents land in our area without being spotted and dealt with." All main crossing places would, therefore, be guarded, and it would be essential "to dominate no-man's land by crossing the water to the enemy." Garrisons for each crossing place were fixed at the equivalent of one rifle company, with the equivalent of the remainder of an infantry battalion so located that it could come to the assistance of its outpost company within 30 minutes on foot or by transport. Further reserves could be located still further to the rear. Outposts or F.D.L.'s need not be occupied by day, save by sentries. Contact between F.D.L.'s would be maintained by O.P.'s during the day and by patrols at night. Close liaison would be

established with local authorities in order that the presence in the corps area of "any unauthorized persons" might be quickly reported. (Ibid: Appx 100, 1 Brit Corps Op Instr No. 18, 7 Nov 44). In the Zeeland Islands the garrison commitment was primarily for "internal security and coast watching." The likely scale of an enemy attack in this area was considered to be infiltration by sea of small bodies of up to company strength, or similar action by paratroops on approximately the same scale, with a build-up on success of up to battalion strength in the first two days. Against such attacks small garrisons would be established at vulnerable points and supported by small centrally located reserves. Garrison points would be interlinked by coastal patrols. (Ibid, December 1944: Appx 69, 1 Brit Corps Op Instr No. 19, 10 Nov 44)

29. The directive of the A/G.O.C.-in-C. was amplified by General Crerar, who had resumed his command on 9 Nov, in a policy directive issued on 13 Nov. After stating that the general situation described in the command directive of 6 Nov continued to obtain, General Crerar said that:

In view of the commitments about to be undertaken by Second Brit Army (complementary to the attack intended by 12 US Army Group) and of our present administrative restrictions, it may be assumed that First Cdn Army will not presently be called upon for any large scale offensive operations.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, November 1944; Directive of 13 Nov 44)

He added, however, that "with an eye on possible future requirements" it was important (a) to seize "any opportunity to improve our present positions vis-a-vis the enemy", if such could be done "without marked cost in casualties or material" and (b) "to keep the enemy anxious, and guessing, concerning our immediate intentions in order that he will retain considerable forces facing the First Cdn Army."

30. General Crerar then outlined the general and special requirements which were to govern the temporary defence of the Army area. Along the front of First Cdn Army patrolling was to be active and aggressive, and members of the Dutch Resistance Groups were to be utilized to assist in such activities. "The general impression will be given that reconnaissance, with a view to early offensive intentions on our part, is being carried out." Specifically, the main task of 2 Cdn Corps was to continue to preserve the security of the Nijmegen bridges. To this end, a study was to be made forthwith of an operation by the Corps to secure the west bank of the Nerdensche (Pannerdensche) Kanaal and the Neder-Rijn from opposite Pannerden to Huissen. Possession of this area would not only add depth in strength to the Nijmegen bridgehead, but might afford important control of flooding in that sector. Additionally, 2 Cdn Corps, by raids, patrolling and artillery tactics, would create in the minds of the enemy its apparent intention to secure a bridgehead across the Neder-Rijn between Arnhem and Wageningen. In the meantime, 1 Brit Corps was to undertake the capture of the Island of Schouwen, as a means of hampering the enemy in his "certain attempts to interfere with the future movement of our shipping in the Scheldt Estuary and the approaches thereto." (Ibid)

31. In 2 Cdn Corps the detailed planning necessary to give effect to the Army Commander's instructions was completed, insofar as the defence of the Corps sector was concerned, on 22 Nov, on which date General Simonds issued three important directives. The first, an operation order which included a definitive appreciation of the sector, is quoted in full as an appendix to this report (see Appx "A"). General Simonds characterized the Corps front as "the most important bit of ground in the northern half of the western front", because the mere possession of the only permanent bridge spanning the main course of the River Rhine gave us the power to develop operations on either bank and constituted a permanent threat and mental hazard to the Germans. His appreciation divided the Nijmegen salient into three main sectors separated by the courses of the lateral river lines running through it. These the General defined as "The Reichswald" - the area between the River Maas and the River Rhine (Waal); "The Island" - the area between the Waal and the Neder-Rijn; and "The Western Approaches" - the area extending from the south bank of the River Waal at Deest (5768) across the junction of the Waal and Maas to the south bank of the latter at Maren.

32. "The Reichswald" contained ground most suitable for offensive operations under all except the most adverse weather conditions. The retention of the high ground west of the line Middelaar - Groesbeek - Beek, now in our hands, was essential to protect Nijmegen Bridge and the southern approach roads leading to it. The sector also provided a strong base for potential operations against the northern flank of the German battle line. "The Island" sector formed the immediate bridgehead covering Nijmegen. The Germans were holding the eastern end, our forward positions running along the general line Bemmel - Elst - then north along the railway line to the south bank of the Neder-Rijn (7076) - thence along the south bank of the river to Opheusden and Ochten (both excl). Offensively the Germans had the advantage that a comparative shallow penetration of our positions in the eastern half of the Island would immediately threaten Nijmegen Bridge, while we could sweep the whole Island clear without prejudicing their defence of the Reichswald or IJssel positions. To capitalize on our possession of Nijmegen Bridge we would have to secure the crossing at Arnhem. This could best be done by "an attack developed from an assault across the Neder-Rijn between both incl Renkum (6276) and Wageningen (5776)." So long as this operation was a possibility it was necessary for us to dominate the whole south bank of the Neder-Rijn. A further point to be considered was that while the Germans continued to hold the eastern end of the Island, they could, when the Rhine was in flood, breach the dykes and flood the Island. In such an event it might be necessary to evacuate the Island except for a shallow bridgehead covering the Nijmegen bridges. A limited attack to drive the Germans across the Neder-Rijn would remove such a danger. The third sector, "The Western Approaches", comprised low-lying polder land covered by the main forces of the Waal and the Maas, and was unsuitable for important offensive action by either side. The sector could be lightly held. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket I, Directive of 22 Nov 44)

33. General Simonds saw three possible offensive operations which might be mounted by 2 Cdn Corps from the Nijmegen salient:

- (a) A limited attack to drive the Germans from the eastern end of the Island;

- (b) A major attack in the Reichswald to break through the northern extension of the Siegfried line in conjunction with the attacks by US and Second British Armies further south.
- (c) A major attack across the Neder-Rijn to capture the high ground north of Arnhem and bridgeheads over the Ijssel, the initial assault crossing being in the sector, both incl, Renkum (6276)- Wageningen (5776).

The G.O.C.'s directive proceeded to detail dispositions of 2 Cdn Corps required to hold the salient and to develop it as an offensive base for any or all of the foregoing proposed operations.

34. 2 Cdn Corps comprised at the time four infantry divisions and one armoured brigade (see para 23). As it was likely that rotation of infantry divisions would be necessary, they were referred to in the Corps Commander's directive as "A", "B", "C" and "D" Divisions in order that specific divisions might be detailed to sectors and tasks as the situation required. Having expressed the three-fold intention of the Corps - to hold and develop the Nijmegen salient as a base for offensive operations; to inflict casualties and undermine the morale of the enemy by patrolling raids and limited offensive use of artillery; and to protect and maintain the Nijmegen bridges - General Simonds assigned the following dispositions and tasks within the Corps area.

35. The Reichswald must be held by two infantry divisions less their reconnaissance regiments. "A" Inf Div with two brigades would hold the right sector from Middelaar to Groesbeek and the spur immediately north in 7555, the town of Cuyk, and be responsible for the local protection of the Grave bridges. Its reserve brigade should be ready in the case of a German withdrawal, to follow up quickly on the axis Mook - Gennep (7746) - crossroads 8347 - Goch. "B" Inf Div with two brigades would hold the remaining sector of the Reichswald from Annetteberg (7356) to the south bank of the Rhine at 780630; it would make use of patrols and raids to gain information for an attack towards the Materborn (8755) in the Reichswald; and would organize its reserve brigade to follow a German withdrawal along the axis Kranenburg - Cleve.

36. "The Island" was to be held by the remaining two infantry divisions. "C" Inf Div would hold the right sector, from the north bank of the Rhine to Haalderen to a point 691730 west of Elst. It would be responsible for the local defence of the Nijmegen bridges, and its patrols would explore the possibility of an attack through the Haalderen - Heuvel (7369) sector to clear the Germans from the Island. On the left flank, "D" Inf Div would cover the approaches to the Nijmegen bridges from the north and west by holding the sector from Elst to the north bank of the Waal at Ochten. By aggressive patrolling it would dominate the line of the Neder-Rijn with a view to an assault crossing west of Driel should the general development of the situation so require. The "Western Approaches" would be held by the divisional reconnaissance regiments of "A" and "B" Inf Divs grouped under command of one regimental headquarters.

37. 2 Cdn Armd Bde was to be in Corps reserve. One regiment would be positioned east of the Heumen - Weurt (Maas - Waal) Canal, while the brigade less one regiment would be west of the canal near the Grave - Nijmegen road. Its tasks were to counter-attack with the reserve brigades of "A" or "B" Inf Divs; to supply each of "A" and "B" Inf Divs with an armoured regiment in the event of German withdrawal; and to be prepared to occupy in succession, each with one armoured regiment, Mill (6444) and St. Antonis (7138) in the event that the Germans should establish themselves west of the Maas about Gennep.

38. In conclusion, the directive dealt with the questions of anti-tank defence, offensive use of artillery, and training for the offensive. General Simonds considered that under the conditions existing in the salient, the allotment of armoured units to back up infantry formations in an offensive role was not justifiable, and that anti-tank defence should be based upon the anti-tank gun placed in carefully sited and properly co-ordinated positions. Shortage of ammunition made it necessary to limit the offensive role of artillery, and employment of artillery would be governed by a centralized control. Because the development and maintenance of communication, particularly on the Island, was made from the point of view of future offensive operations, routine traffic in forward areas must be kept to the minimum. To cover a temporary interruption of traffic across main bridges a series of dumps of supplies, P.O.L., and ammunition would be established on the Island and between the Waal and the Maas in addition to the reserve supplies normally held in formation echelons. It was vitally important that the offensive spirit should be maintained and enhanced, and to this end static conditions made it possible to have a maximum number of troops out on active training. The lull in offensive operations afforded opportunities to properly absorb reinforcements and to re-weld battle teams. "Aggressive patrolling against the enemy is the best school in junior leadership" (Ibid).

39. The second directive of 22 Nov complemented the first. In it the Corps Commander allotted the roles designated in his operation order to specific formations, ordered a programme of reliefs and changes of command, which was to have immediate effect, and announced his intention for the immediate future. These orders may be summarized as follows:

(a) Operational Roles

- "A" Inf Div - 2 Cdn Inf Div
- "B" Inf Div - 3 Cdn Inf Div
- "C" Inf Div - 50 (N) Inf Div - to be relieved by 49 Inf Div when latter becomes available.
- "D" Inf Div - 101 US Airborne Div - to be relieved by 51 (H) Inf Div when latter becomes available.

(b) Reliefs

Pending relief of 101 US Airborne Div by 51 (H) Inf Div, 50 (N) Inf Div will continue the attachment of one squadron of a Recce Regt to 101 US Airborne Div. 51 (H) Inf Div Recce Regt, on arrival in 2nd Canadian Corps area, 23 November, 1944, will come under command of 50 (N) Inf Div.

(c) Changes of Command

- (i) 50 (N) Inf Div will assume command of local defences NIJMEGEN bridges, relieving 7 Cdn Recce Regt, at 1200 hours, 24 November, 1944.
- (ii) 7 Cdn Recce Regt will relieve 12/60 KRRG 24/25 November, 1944: command passing at 1200 hrs, 25 November, 1944.
- (iii) Lieut-Col B.M. ALWAY, CO 8 Cdn Recce Regt, will assume command of WESTERN APPROACHES with under command both 7 and 8 Cdn Recce Regts at 1200 hrs, 25 November, 1944.
- (iv) Comd 2 Cdn Armd Bde will hand over command of WESTERN APPROACHES and assume command of Corps reserve at 1200 hrs, 25 November, 1944.

It is my intention, providing weather and the tactical situation are right, to drive the Germans from the Eastern end of the ISLAND before 49 Inf Div relieves 50 (N) Inf Div. This operation would be mounted by attacking with 49 Inf Div, through 50 (N) Inf Div and subsequently reorganizing to release the latter division.

(Ibid)

40. In the third directive General Simonds established the policy which was to govern the offensive use of the Corps artillery. Thirteen field, four medium regiments, and one heavy regiment - a total of 392 guns - were then available to the Corps Commander but, as long as the Corps remained on the defensive, ammunition was limited, by orders of 21 Army Group, to the following r.p.g. per day: 25-pr, 15; 4.5" and 5.5", 8; 7.2", 10; 155-mm, 3. In order to utilize these resources to maximum effect, the General decided upon the novel expedient of creating a "Corps mobile group" which, consisting of 2 Cdn A.G.R.A., three field, four medium regiments, and one heavy regiment would, from alternative positions, cover "in rotation" and "to maximum possible depth",

- (a) The eastern end of Arnhem Island and the east and north banks of the Neder-Rijn between and including Pannerden and Arnhem,
- (b) the Reichswald, and
- (c) the north bank of the Neder-Rijn from excl Arnhem to incl Wageningen.

41. This plan left a minimum of two field regiments under direct control of each divisional C.R.A., i.e., one field regiment to give D.F. support to each forward brigade. The guns which remained under divisional control were, however, when within range, to take part in concentrations directed on corps targets. The latter, selected at corps level as a result of sifting intelligence information concerning the routes normally used by the enemy, his normal assembly points and concentration areas, H.Qs. and billets, were to be engaged by one synchronized salvo followed at an interval of from 30 minutes to two hours by a second of the same weight. Counter battery concentrations were to be prepared on the same basis. In addition to the ammunition earmarked for corps concentrations, a corps reserve of ammunition was to be created to provide for "minor offensive operations or special C.B. bombardments." Finally, each division was advised to

accumulate a reserve of 25-pr from its daily allotment "to support fighting patrols, planned raids, and for use on special opportunity targets." (Ibid)

42. The regrouping announced by General Simonds in the second directive of 22 Nov was completed on schedule, and by 26 Nov his plans for the operation ("SIESTA") to drive the enemy from the eastern end of the Arnhem - Nijmegen island had been forwarded to the Army Commander. (Ibid, 2 Cdn Corps Plan, Op "SIESTA"). With this task accomplished, General Simonds left his Headquarters on 28 Nov to fulfil an engagement in the U.K. Maj-Gen L.G. Rennie, G.O.C., 51 (H) Div, was appointed to command in his absence (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, 25 Nov 44).

43. On 27 Nov one of the basic assumptions on which the Corps plan for "SIESTA" was based was upset by the sudden withdrawal of 50 (N) Div into 21 Army Group reserve. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 124, GO 2434 of 28 0145 from Exfor to First Cdn Army, referring to GO 2422 of 27 1230A). This division, which had a fine record of service in North Africa, Sicily and Italy and had seen almost continuous action since D Day, was removed on 30 Nov, its place in "C" sector being taken by 49 (W.R.) Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, November 1944, Appx 3, Ops Log, 30 Nov 44, Serial 13). In this situation the Army Commander considered making 4 Cdn Armd Div available to the Corps, and General Simonds was accordingly requested to revise his plans with that end in view. (G.O.C.-in-C./First Cdn Army, File 1-O-4/1: Letter, Gen Crerar to A/Comd 2 Cdn Corps, 28 Nov 44; and 1-O-7/10: Letter Gen Crerar to Comd 2 Cdn Corps, 28 Nov 44). Before this matter was settled, however, certain other conditions which were regarded as essential to the mounting of the operation suddenly changed, and "SIESTA", like "SAILMAKER", was indefinitely postponed.

1 BRIT CORPS FRONT

44. Meanwhile, a similar programme of organization and planning had been completed in 1 Brit Corps. In this case, however, the basic problem of providing for the "aggressive defensive" of the potential operational sector of the lower Maas and the Hollandsche Diep was complicated by the necessity for ensuring the security of the static but decidedly important area of the Scheldt Estuary and the port of Antwerp. 1 Brit Corps had assumed this responsibility on 11 Nov, providing an interim garrison force from army resources then in the area. These were 52 (L) Div, with under command 4 S.S. Bde, the recently formed Dutch Independent Battalions, "Paris" and "Rudolph Fassert", and 59 G.H.Q. Tps R.E. 4 S.S. Bde was, however, to be evacuated from Walcheren as quickly as possible and to be re-equipped prior to joining 2 Cdn Corps, while 52 (L) Div was required on the Maas to enable 4 Cdn Armd Div to pass into Army reserve. With these commitments in view Lt-Gen Crocker, on 10 Nov, had issued orders to the effect that 52 (L) Div would concentrate at Bergen-op-Zoom, leaving one brigade on the island to provide for their defence and to complete the clearing and opening of communications, the marking of minefields, and certain other primary rehabilitation tasks. This brigade would then be relieved by the Royal Netherlands Brigade. The latter was then under orders to concentrate at Wuestwezel on 11 Nov, and to move to come under 52 (L) Div command on the following day. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 123, 1 Brit Corps Op Instr No. 19, 10 Nov 44)

45. Owing to the state of communications between Walcheren and the mainland, the evacuation of the forces then in occupation could not be accomplished at once, and on 10 Nov General Crocker informed the G.O.C.-in-C. that 4 S.S. Bde could not be made available for despatch to 2 Cdn Corps before 21 Nov. (Ibid, Notes on dispositions of 1 Brit Corps with reference to defence of the Scheldt Estuary, 10 Nov 44). At the same time, and at the request of the G.O.C.-in-C., Sir John outlined his views on the future organization of the whole Scheldt area. Pointing out that the defence of the Scheldt and the Dutch islands was "a permanent static commitment closely bound up with the defence and working of the port of Antwerp," and one in which "large naval and A.A. interests were involved," he emphasized that the problem required "close detailed study and attention and, above all, continuity of command and control." His particular concern in the matter was that his own command was stretched along a 100-mile front with its right "closely related to the main and possible future subsidiary field operations" and its left involved in the purely static defence of this "vital L. of C. area." He suggested, therefore, that a separate operational command should be established under H.Q. L. of C. and charged with the defence of Walcheren and North and South Beveland; and that consideration should be given to the question of making the defence of the south bank of the estuary west of Antwerp a further separate commitment directly under H.Q. L. of C. Later, "if and when" Schouwen was cleared, the L. of C. boundary might be altered to include all of the mainland and island territory lying to the west of the line Willemstad - Bergen-op-Zoom - Antwerp. Sir John felt that the Royal Netherlands Bde plus the Independent Dutch Battalions would constitute an adequate garrison force for the three islands, but that the function of command should be given to an A.A. brigade in the area. (Ibid). General Crerar approved the Corps Commander's suggestions with respect to the creation of a separate command for the Scheldt, and on 11 Nov, after consultation with the C.-in-C., sent word to Lt-Gen Crocker that Antwerp and the south bank of the estuary would cease to be a commitment of First Cdn Army within a few days. He added that 21 Army Gp was working on a plan to provide a similar arrangement for the island area as well and that he would not, "in view of the semi-static role of 4 Cdn Armd Div, ask for undue speed in this relief by 52 Div", but "that it could probably be done by 15 Nov". (Ibid, pencilled annotations of G.O.C.-in-C., 11 Nov 44).

46. Antwerp and the adjacent territory on the south bank of the Scheldt passed to H.Q. L. of C. on 18 Nov. (Ibid, GO 3 of 17 1700A, First Cdn Army to 1 Brit Corps). The relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div was, however, delayed considerably beyond the target date, 15 Nov. On 14 Nov General Crocker informed the G.O.C. 52 (L) Div that the Army Commander had decided that the equivalent of one British infantry brigade group should be retained for the defence of Walcheren and North and South Beveland in addition to the Royal Netherlands Brigade. 52 (L) Div, was, therefore, to nominate a brigade for this task. General Crocker stated, however, that 4 S.S. Bde would succeed to this commitment when re-equipped, and that it was hoped that the relief could begin in from seven to ten days' time, when the Brigade H.Q. plus two commandos should be available. (Ibid, Letter from Comd 1 Brit Corps to G.O.C. 52 (L) Div, 14 Nov 44). On the same day the Corps Commander ordered a second brigade of 52 (L) Div to move, on 18 Nov, into the area 's Hertogenbosch - Tilburg where, in Corps Reserve, it would be prepared to act in support or under command of either 1 Pol Armd Div or 4 Cdn Armd Div as

necessity required. (Ibid, 1 Brit Corps Op. Instr No. 21 14 Nov 44). With this move 52 (L) Div was deployed along a wide front stretching from 's Hertogenbosch south-west to Middelburg, with 155 Brigade on the right, in Corps Reserve, 157 Brigade in the centre, in the Divisional concentration area at Bergen-op-Zoom, and 156 Brigade on the left in Walcheren and the Bevelands.

47. By this time the Corps plans for the capture of Schouwen were well advanced and it was found that the manpower resources required for the operation conflicted with those necessary to complete the deployment which the Army Commander had ordered in the Corps sector. The Schouwen operation ("SAILMAKER") was to be mounted by 52 (L) Div, which it was estimated would require a minimum of four infantry battalions, the complete divisional artillery, two field companies, one beach group (to be found from divisional resources) and the divisional headquarters. Additional requirements were tentatively estimated on 16 Nov at four flotillas of L.C.As. and 30 L.C.Ts. The plan involved simultaneous assault landings by two infantry battalions of 157 (L) Bde. The troops were to be carried in L.Vs.T. which, in turn, were to be ferried from the mainland in L.C.Ts. Preceded by the heavy bombing of coastal defence batteries, the assault would be supported by the divisional artillery, its medium guns being deployed on the island of North-Beveland. (Ibid, March 1945: Appx 123, Op "SAILMAKER"; also First Cdn Army Liaison Offr Reports, 16-18 Nov 44). Early in the month the garrison of this partially flooded island had been estimated at some 1000 troops, of which approximately 350 were thought to be Armenians. (AEF 44/First Cdn Army/L/F: First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 132, 9 Nov 44). This estimate was revised, however, in the light of information which was received on 16 Nov by means of the direct tele-communication which then existed between Dutch resistance headquarters on the island and the mainland. This source insisted that the Armenian elements were in the process of being replaced by some 700 reinforcements. (AEF 44/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: Liaison Offr Reports First Cdn Army, 16-17 Nov 44). The target date for Operation "SAILMAKER" was tentatively set at 15 Dec. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 123, Op "SAILMAKER")

48. It was thought that some three weeks would be required (a) for naval force "T" to assemble the necessary support and transport craft and to clear the channels between the islands, and (b) to deploy the medium artillery on North-Beveland. Allowing for an additional week in which to stage the operation and to extricate the elements of the division involved, it was observed that 52 (L) Div would not be available for the relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div for some considerable time. (Ibid). As this matter was one of considerable concern to Army Headquarters, the Corps was offered the use of 4 S.S. Bde as an alternative to 157 (L) Bde. (Ibid, November 1944: Appx 29, GO 98, First Cdn Army to 1 Brit Corps, 16 Nov 44). This offer did not, however, meet the situation envisaged in the Corps plan. Large divisional resources were required in addition to an infantry strength beyond that of the S.S. Bde and in any event the brigade was not expected to be ready for active operations for some weeks. As late as 18 Nov, in fact, only 1000 of its troops were ready to take the field, personal weapons alone were available, and three-quarters of its officers were new to the formation. (AEF 44/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: Liaison Offr Reports, 18 Nov 44). Thus, when the Army Commander requested a provisional re-grouping programme from the Corps which would provide for the desired relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div, he was informed that 52 (L)

Div could not be made available for that purpose for some three weeks. Considering the several circumstances involved, the Army Commander decided that "the requirements for the proposed assault on Schouwen appeared... to be disproportionate to the tactical advantage likely to be gained by having the island in our possession." On 20 Nov, after consultation with the C.-in-C. he accordingly ordered the indefinite postponement of the operation. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C.E: Gen Crerar's Despatches to Minister of National Defence, 31 Jan 44, para 13)

49. On the same day the delayed regrouping of 1 Brit Corps was ordered (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, November 1944: Appx 70, Op Instr No. 46; Appx 100, 1 Brit Corps Op Instr No. 22), 4 S.S. Bde being placed under Corps command to relieve 156 (L) Bde in the Walcheren area. The garrison of the three islands was now to consist of 4 S.S. Bde with under command the Royal Netherlands Bde and the two Dutch independent battalions, and in support one squadron 5 Assault Regt R.E. Once these reliefs were completed the responsibility for the defence of the area was to pass to H.Q. L. of C. Command of the Lith - Raamsdonck sector on the Maas passed to 52 (L) Div on 26 Nov, and 4 Cdn Armd Div withdrew to the 's Hertogenbosch - Tilburg area in Army Reserve. On Walcheren, 4 S.S. Bde assumed control on 27 Nov and on the following day the district passed to under command H.Q. L. of C. Three further developments before the end of the month completed the organization of the Army's left flank sector. On 25 Nov 33 Armd Bde replaced 34 Tk Bde in the 1 Brit Corps reserve area at Etten and established its headquarters at Roosendaal; (Ibid, Appx 93: GO 139, 1 Corps to First Cdn Army, 28 0110A Nov 44); on 27 Nov the operational command of the Dunkirk area reverted to 21 Army Gp, (Ibid, Appx 83: GO 2363, Exfor to First Cdn Army, 24 1410A Nov 44), and on 30 Nov the administrative "island" of Ghent - the last Canadian Army commitment to the south of the Scheldt - was taken over by H.Q. L. of C. (Ibid, Appx 119: GO 2477b, Exfor to First Cdn Army, 30 1715A Nov 44)

CHANGES IN ENEMY DISPOSITIONS, 9 - 30 NOV 44

50. During these three weeks, 9-30 Nov, the deployment of the enemy formations along the 120-mile front of First Cdn Army was subject to almost continuous change as division after division was withdrawn from the area to reinforce the threatened sector about Aachen and Venlo. At the beginning of the period First Para Army, commanded by Generaloberst Kurt Student, the victor of Crete and C.-in-C. of the German Paratroops, and Fifteenth Army, under von Zangen, were deployed opposite 2 Cdn and 1 Brit Corps respectively. General Student's formation was known to contain 86, 2 Para, and 2 S.S. Pz Corps, but of this number 86 Corps was disposed along the upper reaches of the Maas facing the left wing of Second British Army. 2 Para Corps held the central of Reichswald sector with two inferior infantry divisions, 84 and 190, while 2 S.S. Pz Corps, on the right of the army front, was responsible for containing the Arnhem - Nijmegen bridgehead. Within this corps sector, 363 Inf Div held the island line from the Waal at Ochten north-east to Renkum on the Neder-Rijn. Beyond Renkum 10 S.S. Pz Div controlled the Arnhem sector and the eastern end of the island to the Waal near Ghent. The resources of each of these divisions were estimated at the equivalent of the normal strength of five battalions each. The continued presence of 10 S.S. Pz

in the bridgehead was, however, a matter of some doubt. It was over-due for relief, and evidence of movement in its sector on 9 Nov, plus the fact that its sister formations (1, 2, 9, and 12 S.S. and the Panzer Lehr Div) were known to be refitting under Sixth Panzer Army in the Paderborn area, suggested that this relief might have begun. (AEF 44/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I: Int Summary No. 132)

51. Concerning Fifteenth Army, 67 and 88 Corps, and the decimated divisions which they had succeeded in evacuating to the north bank of the Maas, the information available on 9 Nov was based largely upon civilian sources and was by no means complete. 88 Corps had been identified to the west of Tiel, but of its components, 59, 712, and 256 Divs, the only evidence at hand concerned the latter, which was tentatively placed in the Tielerwaard, between the Waal - Merwede junction and Herwijnen. Assuming, however, that 256 Div was responsible for the right flank of 88 Corps, it was thought probable that 712 and 59 Divs might have been assigned to the Bommelerwaard and the Neder-Betuwe, thus completing the gap between 256 Div and the western limit of 363 at Ochten. The position of 67 Corps was even more obscure. It was known to have evacuated 85, 245, 346, 711, and 719 Divs but, on the other hand, it was appreciated that the line from the Merwede through the Land van Altena and the Biesbosch west to the coast scarcely required so great an array of divisions. Army Intelligence commented upon this difficulty as follows: "Some side-stepping or reshuffling is bound to take place with the result that savings will be effected on the Waal which will be spent to better advantage nearer home." (Ibid). In the flooded islands of Schouwen and Overflakke civilian sources placed garrisons of 1000 and 400 respectively. A high proportion of Armenian troops was reported in both garrisons. (Ibid)

52. If Fifteenth Army proved somewhat of a puzzle to our intelligence experts, the salient facts concerning the enemy's general position in the west were straightforward enough. The dominant feature of the moment was "the ever-growing concentration of German air and land power to the west of the Rhine for the defence of the Ruhr." (Ibid). In this area there was "every evidence" that the enemy was "inviting or accepting the challenge of a major battle." (Ibid). On the northern flank of the Canadian Army, Holland was of manifold importance to the enemy. It was a last bulwark to his homeland, the last land barrier to the line of the Rhine. It was also a substantial part of the little that remained of his conquests and from it he could continue to squeeze produce and labour. Finally it was his last base for the "V" offensive against Britain. For the defence of this important area the enemy had disposed some 100,000 troops, of which approximately 50,000 belonged to the defeated Fifteenth Army, while another 30,000 to 40,000 were employed in a static role, presumably under General Christiansen, who had for some time past been C.-in-C., Holland. The balance belonged to the divisions in the Arnhem area. The Army intelligence summary for 9 Nov concluded:

It will be seen that there are gaps in our knowledge at the moment. His main position is building up in the Waal with outposts pushed forward to the Maas, but the troops to occupy them are not as yet tidily arranged.

(Ibid)

53. On 12 Nov the daily intelligence summary struck a somewhat despondent note with the comment "the short days, overcast sky and waste of water between ourselves and the enemy render it difficult to assess his intentions..." (Ibid, No. 135). Information continued to come in, none-the-less. On 14 Nov it was reported that a captured map dated some two weeks earlier had confirmed the suspected enemy deployment in the bridgehead sector, (Ibid, No. 137), and on the following day valuable clues to the situation in the 88 Corps sector were obtained when a farmer, working in his fields near Dongen, picked up a bundle of documents which were found to contain the 88 Corps operation instruction for "DOPPELSPRUNG" (the withdrawal across the Maas). (Ibid, No.138)

54. Thus, by 17 Nov the puzzle was beginning to appear less formidable. A new army group, "North", commanded by General Student from a headquarters near Hilversum, was now reported to control von Zangen's army and First Para Army. The former had his headquarters at Utrecht, while the headquarters of First Para Army was thought to be a few miles north of Anholt. The exact location of enemy headquarters was not easy, however, particularly since they appear to have adopted the policy of moving every eight to ten days following the success of a heavy air attack on known headquarters' locations earlier in the month. Of the divisions, 256 and 59 of 88 Corps were now reported side by side on the Waal, with the gap between 59 and 363 still unfilled, while 712 Div had appeared, in Army reserve, "as a shadow form in the Culamborg... sector." 67 Corps had also been identified, being reported on the north bank of Hollandsch Diep from Kop Van't Land to Hellevoetsluis, with a probable headquarters near Gouda. (Ibid, No. 140). 711 Div appeared to be "fairly certain" in the sector between the Waal - Mermede junction and Dordrecht, with 331 Div on its right in charge of the islands and the coastal sector south-west of Rotterdam. 85 was reported from ground sources to be near Dordrecht, 245 appeared "likely" on the north bank of the Waal between 711 and 346 Divs, while 719 had been located "by sign-posts" "in the very general area of Gouda." Schouwen was being reinforced - "clearly the enemy are strengthening the islands with a view to putting up a stubborn resistance should it come to a show-down" - and it seemed probable that 346 Div might be in the process of replacing 331 ("never an effective fighting force") in this area. (Ibid)

55. Three days later, elements of 10 S.S. Pz Div had been identified north of Emmerich, and there were indications of a possible move by portions of 245 and 85 Divs of Fifteenth Army. (Ibid, No. 143). On 21 Nov, prisoner of war sources confirmed the presence of 711 Div to the north of Geertruidenberg and that of 712 Div to the west of Tiel. (Ibid, No. 144). On 25 Nov, the first definite evidence of the dispersal of Fifteenth Army was received with the identification of 256 V.G. Div in Alsace. (Ibid, No. 148). 719 Div seemed to be involved in this movement as well, since civilian reports had it that the division had left its former H.Q. on 15 Nov. Apparent confirmation of the relief of 331 by 346 Div was also received on 24 Nov in a report that the Divisional Headquarters had returned to its former location in Oud Beijerland. (Ibid)

56. Evidence of the dispersal not only of Fifteenth Army, but of 2 S.S. Pz Corps as well, continued to accumulate, and by 2 Dec a decided change in the enemy picture was apparent. General Schlemm, an able paratroop commander who had fought

with distinction in Italy, now appeared as the commander of First Para Army. Fifteenth Army had disappeared, presumably leaving in its former area the troops commanded by the C.-in-C. Holland. 88 Corps remained active in the central sector, but of 67 there was no news whatsoever. Of the divisions, 10 S.S., 245, 256, and 363 had made their appearance elsewhere, two to the north of Strasbourg and two to the north-east of Aachen. The enemy front opposite our lines appeared then to be held from [our] right to left by 190, 84, 6 Para (in the "waterlogged shoes of 10 S.S." at Arnhem), an unknown, 712, 711, and 346. Only four divisions of Fifteenth Army remained to be accounted for: 331, 719, 59 and 85, but of these evidence was at hand which suggested that 331 and 719 had left Utrecht by rail on 23/24 Nov, and that 85 had also moved eastwards. 59 Div had not been reported since 19 Nov. (Ibid, No. 155)

57. All this information led to revised appreciation of the enemy's intentions with respect to our front. The "thinning out" of the area to the west of Tiel suggested that he intended to garrison the formidable barriers of the Waal, the Maas, and the Hollandsch Diep with minimum forces, while the maintenance of his two-division deployment against our bridge-head forces, and the pronounced stiffening of his A.A. defence in the area, together with the presence of 26 Para Div in the Arnhem salient, indicated not only an intention to hold in this sector, but possibly to initiate offensive operations against the Nijmegen bridges. (Ibid).

58. Meanwhile, activity on both sides of the front had conformed to the normal pattern of static warfare - an unexciting round of patrols and H.F. and C.B. shoots varied by training exercises and local reliefs, carried out, in this instance, in a seemingly endless gloom of overcast skies, mud, and rain. Only on infrequent occasions did the excitement of even a minor raid serve to relieve the monotony. There were, however, a number of events of operational interest in the period. Surveying enemy activity for the week 9-16 Nov, the Army intelligence authorities concluded:

It seems abundantly clear that the enemy is like a spirited and skilled but tiring boxer. Until you knock him out he will continue fighting, will get up when he is knocked down, and when left to himself will come at you again. We see something of this in his renewing activities before us. The mines or boats at Nijmegen, the shelling of Geertruidenberg, his activities (against partisans) in the Biesbosch, the new guns at Port Prins Frederik, and the reinforcement of Schouwen, all remind us that he's still in the ring.

(Ibid, No. 139)

59. The events of the following fortnight seemed to confirm this view. On 18 Nov the long quiescent Dunkirk sector achieved a minor headline with the report that an enemy force, preceded by a heavy artillery and mortar preparation, had issued from the invested fortress to make two attacks against the Czech positions at Moerdijk. Neither attack was successful. (Ibid, No. 141). A week later Zeeland was in the news. On 24 Nov fifteen Armenian deserters from Schouwen volunteered the information that we had been expected to attack the island during the preceding week. (Ibid, No. 148 and No. 149). Early on the following morning

"a sea-borne invasion of Noord Beveland" suggested that the enemy was still concerned about our intentions in this sector. The 'invasion' effort turned out to be a clumsily mounted raid by some 30 troops of 40 Einsatz Kommando who had been briefed to discover our garrison strength in men and tanks, and to destroy the harbour installations of Colijnsplaat. The officer commanding the raid was killed shortly after the landing and 25 of his party were captured. (Ibid). With this incident, Zeeland receded once more into the obscurity of its November fogs and rain.

60. In the Reichswald, 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs during the week 19-25 Nov had initiated an "aggressive local activity" by battle patrols in order to dominate the extensive no-man's-land opposite their F.D.Ls. (AEF 44/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: Hist Offr Weekly and Monthly Summaries of Ops; and the same for 3 Cdn Inf Div). Little response was forthcoming from the enemy, however, until the night of 27/28 when his patrols ventured into the disputed area - with the result that our own troops secured identification from 84 Fus Bn and 1051 G.R. of 84 Inf Div. (AEF 44/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I: First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 151). Valuable evidence of the enemy's interest in this sector was provided by two deserters from 1052 G.R. who were brought into our lines the same night, and who told that 20 days' leave had been promised to patrols which were successful in bringing in Allied prisoners. (Ibid). During the two nights 28/29 Nov and 30 Nov/1 Dec, fighting patrols of the R. de Chaud and the Q.O.R. of C. attempted to gain control of a small area in front of the 8 Cdn Inf Bde sector in squares 7660-7661, but were driven back by very heavy enemy M.G. fire. (AEF 44/2 C.I.D. and 3 C.I.D./C/F, Docket I: Hist Offr Reports, 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, 26 Nov - 2 Dec 44). A corps H.F. programme fired from each sector in rotation between 24 and 28 Nov failed to produce any satisfactory reply from the enemy guns. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 26 Nov; and AEF 44/2 Cdn Corps/C/H: Ops Log, 24-28 Nov 44)

61. In the bridgehead salient, enemy action against the Nijmegen bridges began early on the afternoon of 15 Nov, when two floating mines escaped the vigilance of the watchers on the banks of the Waal. The first exploded against the naval boom, while the second - "an innocent-looking log" - blew a 300-foot gap in the barge bridge up-stream from the main bridges. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 16 Nov 44). During the night 20/21 Nov the boom was again breached by a floating mine. (Ibid, 21 Nov 44; note sketch of bridge defences appended). These attempts resulted in an important strengthening of the river defences of the bridges. By 21 Nov an anti-personnel pontoon boom was in place up-stream, anti-personnel pontoon "necklaces" had been constructed round the bridge piers, and a naval net installed between the anti-personnel boom and the road bridge. The barge bridge was not replaced, but assembled ready for use on the banks between the road and rail bridges. (Ibid)

62. The potential seriousness of these or similar attacks on the bridges was overshadowed, however, by the existence of another threat to the tenure of our position in the salient. Early in the month the waters of the Neder-Rijn and Waal had begun to rise, and it was known that once the rivers rose above 9.5 meters the position of our garrison troops might be jeopardized, either by a natural increase in the flood - in 1923, when the waters reached a height of thirteen meters and overflowed the dykes, only the two forts guarding Nijmegen

and the Nijmegen - Arnhem highway had remained above water (Ibid, 13 Nov 44) - or by enemy action against the dyke system above or below Arnhem. Evacuation plans devised to meet either contingency were already a part of the permanent defence scheme for the sector. Issued by 30 Corps on 22 Oct as operation "NOAH", these plans provided for a normal withdrawal in the face of enemy action (a) to an intermediate position on the general line Bommel - Elst - Valburg - Herveld, and (b) to the south bank of the Waal. A close bridgehead which would include the Nijmegen forts and the northern approaches to the bridges was, however, to be held at all costs. In order to avoid overcrowding on the evacuation routes during the operation, the evacuation of the civilian population was to precede that of the troops. Danger warnings were to be issued in code as the necessity arose, i.e. "WATER WINGS" would mean "a marked rise in the level of the rivers"; "SPRING TIDE" - "flood conditions"; and "DELUGE" - "the breaching of the dykes". In the event an attack on the bridges coincided with the development of an emergency on the island, the evacuation of the garrison would be facilitated by the use of a barge bridge and some 45 D.U.K.Ws. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945; Appx 116, 30 Corps Op "NOAH"; also First Cdn Army LO's Reports 12 Nov 44)

63. At 0545 hours on the morning of 12 Nov the water level at Nijmegen reached 9.58 meters and was reported rising fast. (2 Cdn Corps, Ops Log, 12 Nov 44). At 0845 hours the evacuation of the civilian population in the Elst and Bommel areas was ordered for the morning of 13 Nov; (Ibid, Serial 16) and at 1100 and 1430 hours the code words "WATER WINGS" and "SPRING TIDE" were flashed to all formations in the sector. (Ibid, Serials 18 and 27). With the development of this threat a pronounced increase in the shelling on its entire front, particularly in the area of Elst, was reported from 50 (N.) Div. (Ibid, 16 Nov 44)

64. Further enemy action did not materialize, however, and between 13 Nov and 2 Dec approximately 12,000 civilians and several thousand head of cattle were removed from the island. By agreement with the Dutch authorities some three to four thousand males remained in the area to look after stock, property, and crops, and 2 Cdn Corps undertook to transport sufficient labour into the area daily to complete the harvest. (W.D., C.A., First Cdn Army, December 1944; Appx 4, Weekly Reports). Meanwhile the water had continued to rise. On 12 Nov the F.D.Ls. of the S.D. & G. Highrs to the east of Nijmegen had had to be withdrawn (2 Cdn Corps, Ops Log, 12 Dec 44), and on 13 Nov 12 K.R.R.C. reported that in the "Western Approaches" the area immediately west of Drutten was flooding rapidly. (Ibid, 13 Nov 44). Flooding in these areas was not serious, however, and attention remained concentrated on the bridge approaches and the threat to the eastern end of the island. By 16 Nov the river levels reached 11.70, (Ibid, 16 Nov 44), then began to drop. Three days later it seemed that the crisis might have passed when the level of 11 meters was recorded (Ibid, 19 Nov 44), but by 24 Nov the waters were rising again. (Ibid, 24 Nov 44). On 29 Nov they stood at the dangerous level of 12.71 meters (Ibid, 29 Nov 44). At this stage the Maas was also flowing at unusually high levels and up-stream, in the area of Cuyk, the Camerons of C. were forced to withdraw into the adjoining sector of the S. Sask R. (2 Cdn Inf Div, Hist Offr's Summary, 26 Nov - 2 Dec 44)

65. During the last few days of the month the relief of 101 U.S. Airborne Div by 51 (H) Div had been in progress. The bulk of this division was removed from the island by storm boat ferry between 24 and 27 Nov. During the two days 25-26 Nov, when the river level had passed the 12 meter mark, 4,100 men were carried across the swollen Waal. (2 Cdn Corps, Ops Log, 26 Nov 44, Serial 18). During the night 23/24 Nov the enemy paid 101 Airborne the somewhat dubious compliment of a farewell salute by shelling its headquarters. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports 24 Nov 44). On 28 Nov 49 (W.R.) Div began to move into the salient to relieve 50 (N) Div, which, after many weeks on the island, was moving into 21 Army Gp reserve.

66. Enemy aircraft, after a fortnight's inactivity, suddenly appeared over the 3 Cdn Inf Div sector on 26 Nov and dropped four bombs which caused 13 casualties to the S.D. & G, Highrs and eight to units of the divisional artillery. (Ibid, 27 Nov 44). Three days later there was another small "incident" when three bombs caused five casualties to personnel of 33 A. Tk Bty. (AEF: 44/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/H: Ops Log, 29 Nov 44). Rocket activity, too, increased at this time. Twelve V-1s were observed over the Corps area on 27 Nov (2 Cdn Corps, Ops Log, 27 Nov 44), and "numerous rocket launchings" were reported by the Recce Group on 30 Nov. (Ibid, 30 Nov 44)

67. By the end of the month the general atmosphere in the Reichswald and in the bridgehead salient was tense with the expectancy of impending operations. The enemy had proved himself on the alert, and on 24 Nov his military commentator, Sertorius, had broadcast:

In the northern sector of the western front, fighting between the Maas at Venlo and the eastern outskirts of the Huertgen forest at Duren has more and more condensed into a single battle. It must hourly be expected to extend into the Nijmegen area.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I:
First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 148,
25 Nov 44)

As November ended word was received that the first Allied convoy had entered the harbour of Antwerp on the 28th^W (SHAEF, Weekly Int Summary No. 37, Part III: 2 Dec 44). On the last two days of the month the Supreme Allied Commander visited formations and units of 1 Brit Corps, Corps Headquarters, 84 Gp R.A.F., and Main Headquarters First Cdn Army (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 29 Nov 44).

68. The expected attempt against our positions in the bridgehead salient began on the afternoon of 2 Dec. At 1300 hours the German artillery opened up with a series of abnormally intensive concentrations, (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 125, "Highlights of Ops", 3 Dec 44) and, at approximately 1710 hours, the dykes on the south bank of the Neder-Rijn were breached near the Arnhem railway bridge. (AEF: 44/2 Cdn Corps/C/H: Sitrep 03 0420A Dec 44). Despite counter-battery fire from our own guns, the enemy continued his concentrations throughout

* The Canadian built "Fort. Cataragui" was the first ship berthed.

the night and the early hours of the following morning. (W.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 125, "Highlights of Ops"). Meanwhile the waters of the Neder-Rijn spread steadily across the island. As at last light 3 Dec the floods had advanced south to the area of Elst and west to Zetten, inundating an area of some 15 to 20 square miles. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 156, 3 Dec 44)

"OFFENSIVE DEFENCE"

69. The evacuation of the forward troops of 51 (H) and 49 (W.R.) Divs began at once and proceeded according to plan. At the same time precautionary measures against a sudden attack by 6 Para Div on the Nijmegen bridges were put into effect. In the 49 (W.R.) sector on the right, 2 Gloucesters had been evacuated to the south bank of the Waal and the balance of 56 (W.R.) Bde concentrated in the area immediately to the west of Elst when (2 Cdn Corps Sitrep, 04 0255A Dec 44), in the early hours of 4 Dec, II and III/16 Para Regt, supported by one company of 6 Para Div A. Tk Bn attacked the F.D.Ls. of 7 D.W.R. (Duke of Wellington's Regt) of 147 Bde near the village of Halderen. Some initial penetration was achieved, but with the assistance of tanks of 11 R.S.F. (Royal Scots Fusiliers) the situation was restored at a cost to the attacking force of approximately 50 dead and some 110 prisoners. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 157, 4 Dec 44). From the latter - who were, for the most part, young paratroops who had little or no experience in an infantry role - it was learned that the infantry attack had been intended as a cover for an attempt by a special engineer demolition section against the Nijmegen bridges. All in all, the attack was not an impressive affair, being "ill-conceived and poorly executed." (Ibid, No. 160, 7 Dec 44). The attacking troops were poorly trained and inadequately briefed, the artillery barrage which was to have preceded the attack was ten minutes late and proved ineffective, and the engineer section involved never got off the ground. (Ibid, No. 162, 9 Dec 44). The solid fact that an attack had been made, however, coupled with the breaching of the dykes, and evidence from Tactical Reconnaissance that the whole area of 6 Para Div was active with flak and ground movement suggested that General Schlemm was "inaugurating his regime with a show of vigor which may extend to other parts of his front." (Ibid, No. 157, 4 Dec 44)

70. After the Halderen attack the sector of 49 (W.R.) Div stabilized very quickly, and further evacuation proved unnecessary, although on 5 Dec the flood waters overflowed the banks of the Linge to the west of Elst and spread south toward Herveld. (Ibid, No. 158, 5 Dec 44). In the left sector the situation was more serious. 152 (H) Bde had been evacuated on 3 Dec, (2 Cdn Corps Sitreps, 4-6 Dec 44), 153 Bde less one battalion on 4 Dec, (Ibid), and on 5 Dec the two brigades were followed by H.Q. 51 (H) Div and one battalion of 154 Bde. (Ibid). The division concentrated in the area St Michielsgestel - Dinther south-east of 's Hertogenbosch, with its headquarters at Hooge Heide. (Ibid, W.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 125, "Highlights of Ops", 6 Dec 44). 154 (H) Bde less 7 A. & S.H. but including 5/7 Gordons of 153 Bde, remained on the island (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 5-6 Dec 44), adjusting its positions to meet the increasing severity of the flood. By 5 Dec the waters had poured through a second breach blown

slightly to the west of Randwijk on 3 Dec, to flood the sector as far west as Kesteren and from Kesteren south across the neck of land between the rivers to Ochten. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 158, 5 Dec 44). Here, on the line of the De Linie dyke the waters were halted only to back up against the dyke wall and to flood the area on the north bank of the Waal east to Dodewaard. (Ibid, No. 159, 6 Dec 44). The De Linie dyke was itself blown on 7 Dec, and by last light on the following day the floods had extended further west to within 1000 yards of Buren. (Ibid, No. 160, 7 Dec 44)

71. On 6 Dec 154 (H) Bde came under command 49 (W.R.) Div, and the latter assumed full responsibility for the security of the shrunken bridgehead. (2 Cdn Corps Sitreps, 6 Dec 44)

72. On 8 Dec Sertorius assessed the value of the floods to the Wehrmacht. "The blowing up of the dykes of the lower Rhine has," he said, "if not wholly destroyed, certainly greatly reduced the value of Nijmegen bridgehead as a strategic starting point for an attack. The area between the Waal and the Neder-Rijn can be used no longer as an assembly area... and a major attack toward the Zuider Zee or Oldenburg has thus become impossible." (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 161, 8 Dec 44)

73. For the greater part of the next fortnight there was little change in the flood situation. The river level at Nijmegen remained above 12 meters until 17 Dec, but it had dropped to 10.34 by 24 Dec. (2 Cdn Corps Sitreps, 8-24 Dec 44). Operational activity, too, seemed to have reverted to the November pattern of patrol actions, artillery exchanges, and local regrouping. In this period, however, the almost nightly contests in the no-man's-land opposite both corps sectors were conducted with a sharpness and vigor which reflected the intention of First Cdn Army to resume active operations at an early date.

74. During the night 7/8 Dec a raid by one company of the R.H.C., supported by artillery and mortar fire, on 758518 in the Knapheide - Grafwegen area opposite the sector of 5 Cdn Inf Bde, inflicted on the enemy the loss of one prisoner from 1224 GR and 27 casualties in killed and wounded against our own casualties of one killed and 20 wounded. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 8 Dec 44). Two nights later a patrol of 2 Gloucesters fought a successful skirmish in the area east of Elst over the remains of a derelict aircraft which had been used by the enemy as an O.P., took 13 prisoners and killed six paratroops from 1/16 Para Regt without cost in own casualties. (Ibid, 10-11 Dec 44). During the night 12/13 Dec, in the sector of 3 Cdn Inf Div, a patrol of the N. Shore R., after killing an enemy party in a house in the open fields to the west of Wyler, became involved in a minature battle and withdrew from the area without loss under cover of a battery D.F. task. (3 Cdn Inf Div, Hist Offr's Summary, 10-16 Dec 44). On the following night a patrol of the Regina Rif, preceded by "unusually heavy artillery support", raided Eindjeshof farm, south of Erlekom, but suffered nine casualties to heavy machine gun fire and were forced to withdraw. (Ibid). Early on the morning of 17 Dec an enemy patrol supported by artillery captured a platoon position of the Q.O.R. of C. Our own platoon withdrew after suffering casualties of eleven wounded and six missing, but the position was retaken before first light 19 Dec. (Ibid, Week 17-23 Dec; and First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 17 Dec 44)

75. In the western portion of the island sector patrols of 49 (W.R.) and 51 (H) Divs brought in five prisoners from 13 Para Regt on the night 15/16 Dec. (Ibid, 16 Dec 44). In the reconnaissance group sector in the "Western Approaches", three enemy patrols, preceded by an artillery preparation, crossed the Waal in two motor boats, and inflicted casualties of one killed, two wounded, and 11 missing on the Dutch company which patrolled the south bank of the river east of Wamel and north of Hooge Kamp. (Ibid, 18 Dec 44). At the opposite end of the front, in the 2 Cdn Inf Div sector, an attempt by the Fus M.R. to obtain prisoners during the night 17/18 was unsuccessful. (Ibid, 17-18 Dec 44). Early in the morning of 20 Dec, however, the S. Sask R. secured an identification from 1225 G.R. of 190 Div. (2 Cdn Inf Div, Hist Offr's Summary, Week 17-23 Dec 44)

76. From this source it was learned that 86 Corps, with its headquarters at Kappeln, now controlled the Reichswald with on the right 84 Inf Div, and on the left 190 Inf Div. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 173, 20 Dec 44). In the Arnhem - Nijmegen salient the results of our patrol efforts during this period indicated that 6 Para Div alone opposed our forces in place of the two divisions which had previously shared this sector.

77. It had been anticipated that, following the breaching of the dykes of the Neder-Rijn, the enemy might seek to reduce his commitment in the polder-land between the Waal and the Maas, opposite the sector of 1 Brit Corps, by flooding the areas around Tiel and those immediately south of Zaltbommel and Gorinchem. (Ibid, No. 156, 3 Dec 44). Movement and demolitions in the Tiel - Ophemert sector between 10 and 12 Dec seemed to confirm this view, (Ibid, No. 164, 11 Dec 44), but the other areas in question remained unaffected. Similarly, the possibility of an attempt against the dykes on the Maas north of 's Hertogenbosch led to the preparation of plans for the evacuation of the civilian populations from the district Heusden - 's Hertogenbosch - Vlijmen. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Brit Corps, 6 and 9 Dec 44; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, December 1944). The enemy, however, appeared content with the existing water barriers in this area. A number of the river villages - Lith, Empel, Engelen, Heusden, and Lage Zaluwe - had been evacuated on an earlier occasion but the conditioning factors were then impending operations and their exposure to enemy action. (W.D., C.A., First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 6, Monthly Report, December 1944)

78. On 1 Dec 4 Cdn Armd Div returned to its former positions in the Lith - Raamsdonk sector, and 52 (L) Inf Div passed from under command First Cdn Army "to enable Second Brit Army to carry out an operation then being planned against the enemy salient between Heinsberg and Roermond." (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45, para 18)

79. Meanwhile, patrol activity in the Corps sector had conformed to the general pattern of similar operations in 2 Cdn Corps. In this case, however, the existence of a formidable water barrier between our own positions and those of the enemy, and the thin deployment of our forces - from 11 Nov two divisions plus a small ad hoc force based on 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt had held a front some 70 miles in length - added considerably to the strain and hardship of the patrol routine. The small contact patrols which were maintained at night between our widely separated F.D.Ls. groped their

way across a wintry waste of half-submerged and half-frozen river meadows, and over long stretches of dykeland and drainage ditches to meet their opposite number, while reconnaissance and fighting patrols, after navigating the swift current of the Maas in darkness, had to cross a similar no-man's-land on the far bank before they could contact the enemy. Of 31 patrols which were sent across the river between 1 and 22 Dec more than one succeeded in the crossing only to be forced back by flooding, wire, machine-gun fire or flares encountered on the north bank.

80. In the same period 29 enemy patrols were reported in the area of our F.D.Ls: 14 in the first week of December, four in the second, and 11 in the third. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 188, 4 Jan 45). On the night 4/5 Dec, during the final stage of the relief of 52 (L) Div, the enemy made his most impressive - and most successful - attempt to penetrate our lines. On the extreme right a standing patrol of 52 (L) Div was surprised near Het Wild by an enemy patrol estimated to be some 20 strong, and withdrew. With the assistance of a second Lowland patrol and of elements of 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt the situation was eventually restored, and by the morning not an enemy patrol of 20 but a party of 20 badly frightened civilian line-crossers and an enemy patrol of nine were safely in our net. The latter belonged to a newly-organized company which had moved into the river line a few days earlier. They were unable to identify their regiment but volunteered the information that they had been sent to reconnoitre the Maren area. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports 5-6 Dec 44). In the centre, a second enemy patrol ambushed a patrol of 7/9 R.S. near Bokhoven, killed four, wounded two, and withdrew with a probable four prisoners. (Ibid, 5 Dec 44). To the left, a patrol of the A. & S.H. of C, operating along the river bank north of Waalwijk clashed with a third enemy patrol, and had one man wounded against two enemy believed killed. (Ibid; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Dec 44). In the sector of 1 Pol Armd Div a fourth enemy patrol was believed to have suffered casualties during a brief skirmish with a Polish patrol. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 5 Dec 44). A total of six enemy patrols were thought to have operated along the Corps front that night, (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 188, 4 Jan 45), but of the fate of the remaining two definite information is not available.

81. On the night 5/6 Dec an enemy patrol some 20 strong engaged a standing patrol of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) in the polders south of Fort Crevecoeur. The latter returned fire until its ammunition was exhausted, then withdrew. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 6 Dec 44). The front was quiet during the next two nights, but there was considerable activity on the night 8/9 Dec and again the Crevecoeur area was the centre of interest. Late on the afternoon of 8 Dec two fighting patrols of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) advanced on the Fort from the east and south under cover of smoke and H.E. fired by 21 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts. The enemy replied with small arms and mortars both from Crevecoeur itself and from his positions on the north bank of the Maas at Hedel, but his garrison withdrew during the night. Sporadic fire from the north bank was maintained on the morning of 9 Dec, but by mid-afternoon our own troops had occupied the position. The enemy signified his strong disapproval with a vicious spate of mortaring. (Ibid, 9 Dec 44; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 9 Dec 44)

82. From 13 Dec the patrol programme of 4 Cdn Armd Div was intensified following the announcement that, in view of the probable future commitments, information concerning enemy strengths, defences, and dispositions, and the ground conditions on the north bank of the Maas from including Alem Island to including Munsterkerk would be required by 28 Dec. Special attention was to be paid to Alem Island, Driel, Heonzadriel, Hedel, Ammerzoden, Well, Neder Hamert, Genderen, and Drongelen. (Ibid, Appx 7: Div Patrolling Policy, 13 Dec 44). Implementing this new policy, the Division's patrols made a number of successful crossings during the following week, established forward listening posts, and at least a limited right of tenancy to a factory at Kerkdriel on Alem Island. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 14-20 Dec 44; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 14-21 Dec 44)

83. The information acquired through this effort and from all other sources during the period confirmed the presence in the line of, from right to left, 712, 711, and 346 Infantry Divisions. 712, however, was found to be holding a very narrow sector to the west of Tiel, while 711, with the assistance of Battalion Koch in the sub-sector Hedel - St Andries, was stretched from Alem Island to the western boundary of the Biesbosch at the Marvede. In the coastal sector, 346 Div was reported on 13 Dec to have increased the garrison of Overflakkee to some 2,000 troops, of which 500 were Armenians. To the north of the Waal, 331 Div, the "elusive" Division Tettau, a formation which continually evaded a more precise definition, and a number of more or less anonymous paratroop formations were discerned. (First Cdn Army Int Summaries Nos. 169-172, 16-19 Dec 44)

84. As in the November period, enemy activity in the air was largely restricted to his use of V-weapons. For several days prior to 10 Dec, however, single reconnaissance planes were observed over the Nijmegen - 's Hertogenbosch area. (Ibid, No. 163, 10 Dec 44), and on 17 Dec some 20 enemy aircraft were reported over the Army front above Nijmegen, Grave, Tilburg, Breda and Roosendaal. Seven of the 20 were destroyed. (Ibid, No. 170, 17 Dec 44; and W.D., G.S. (Plans), H.Q. First Cdn Army December 1944: Appx 19, Minutes of Morning Joint Conferences, 18 Dec 44)

FOUNDATIONS FOR OPERATION "VERITABLE"

85. By mid-December the troops of First Cdn Army had been employed in a semi-static role for more than six weeks. At Army Headquarters, meanwhile, the Planning Section of the General Staff had been preoccupied with the theme of future operations. In accordance with the C.-in-C.'s directive of 2 Nov, plans had been prepared for four specific operations:

- (a) an attack by 1 Brit Corps to capture the Island Schouwen, in Operation "SAILMAKER";
- (b) an attack by 2 Cdn Corps against the enemy positions in the eastern sector of the Betuwe - "SIESTA"; or
- (c) alternatively, an assault crossing of the Neder-Rijn direct on Apeldoorn - "WALLSTREET"; and

- (d) an offensive operation by First Cdn Army to be launched south-east of Nijmegen against the enemy positions between the Maas and the Rhine in the Reichswald - "VERITABLE".

86. "SAILMAKER" was indefinitely postponed on 20 Nov, and by 5 Dec the flooding of the Betuwe had rendered both operations planned for that sector impracticable. These were Corps operations, however, and since 17 Nov, when the Chief of Staff announced to his morning conference that the "likely direction" of the next major operations of First Cdn Army would be to the south-east of Nijmegen and directed that branches and sections should consider this plan a first priority (W.D., G.S. (Plans), H.Q. First Cdn Army, November 1944: Appx 8, Minutes, 17 Nov 44), the possibility of an Army show had dominated our Planning headquarters. At the end of November an early resumption of large-scale operations was not considered probable, but shortly after 1 Dec it appeared "that First Cdn Army would be called upon to undertake a major offensive operation considerably earlier than had been intended...", (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45, para 19), and the planning for Operation "VERITABLE" was accordingly accelerated. On 6 Dec it was decided that H.Q. 30 Corps and 30 Corps Troops, three British infantry divisions, one British armoured division, four independent tank and armoured brigades, and four A.G.R.As. would be added to the resources of First Cdn Army for the purposes of the operation, that the responsibility for launching the attack would be given to 30 Brit Corps, and that the total air support available to 21 Army Group would be provided. The target date was to be as soon as possible after 1 Jan 45. (Ibid, para 20)

87. H.Q. 30 Corps passed to under command First Cdn Army on 13 Dec and established itself at Boxtel. (Ibid; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 124, 30 Corps to First Cdn Army, 13 2255A Dec 44). On the following day the G.O.C.-in-C. issued his first directive on Operation "VERITABLE".

88. The full story of Operation "VERITABLE" is not properly within the scope of the present Report (See Report No. 155). The role allotted to 1 Brit Corps, however, and the large-scale movement and regrouping which were necessary to bring the assault formations into the line, necessarily had their effect upon the normal routine of the period.

89. Briefly stated, the task allocated to 1 Brit Corps was the implementation of the "VERITABLE" cover plan. The 'story' which this plan was intended to convey to the enemy was that 12 U.S. Army Group was taking over a portion of 21 Army Group sector to enable the divisions of 30 Brit Corps to rest and refit. Political pressure, however, dictated an early attempt to secure the liberation of north Holland and, with that end in view, First Cdn Army had received instructions to commence preparations for a crossing of the Maas and the Waal along the axis 's Hertogenbosch - Utrecht. For this purpose the rested divisions of 30 Brit Corps, supported by an allied airborne corps, were to be made available to the Canadian Headquarters. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 1, Directive 1-0-7/11, 14 Dec 44, Op "VERITABLE", paras 11-12)

90. In general it was felt that the initial large-scale movement of the assault formations of 30 Corps and that of four A.G.R.As. through the sector of 1 Brit Corps would sustain this general conception. 1 Brit Corps was, however,

to initiate small-scale operations by which it would indicate a "positive intention and ambition in regards to the possession of the 'Island' on either side of the Hedel - Zaltbommel road". (Ibid, paras 13-14)

91. The principal responsibility for the implementation of the deception scheme was delegated to H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div which, on 17 Dec, issued its outline plan for Operation "POUNCE". The object of this plan was:

"to deceive the enemy into thinking that a major offensive is being mounted by First Cdn Army to complete the liberation of Holland on the gen axis Hadel - Zaltbommel - Utrecht thus forcing the retention in Holland of forces which might be emp to greater advantage elsewhere."

(4 Cdn Armd Div file 1-1/Ops
("POUNCE"))

The method by which the object was to be achieved involved the following developments:

- (a) a simulated airborne landing north of the River Waal;
- (b) the concentration of amphibious vehicles in the general area 's Hertogenbosch - Tilburg;
- (c) the concentration of considerable bridging equipment in the general area 's Hertogenbosch;
- (d) the digging of sufficient gun pits to indicate the employment of approximately eight Div Artys and two A.G.R.As.; and
- (e) the establishment of a bridgehead in the area of Hedel, ostensibly to permit the construction of a bridge or bridges across the Maas from Crevecoeur to Hedel.

The operation was to be mounted in late December or early in January, depending on the date fixed for the opening of Operation "VERITABLE". (Ibid). Thus it was that, on 13 Dec, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div - "in view of probable future commitments" - ordered an intensification of its patrol programme and the acquisition of certain information concerning the Alem - Munsterkerk sector by 28 Dec.

92. While 1 Brit Corps thus pursued its plan for the implementation of the deception cover, the physical preparations for the coming offensive were in progress. 21 Army Group approved the construction of two additional road bridges and the 'decking' of the railroad bridge over the Maas in the Ravenstein area on 14 Dec; (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 124, First Cdn Army to 2 Cdn Corps and 30 Corps 14 1520A Dec 44); the Schijndel - Veghel - Mill railway was re-opened for traffic on 16 Dec; (W.D., G.S. (Plans), H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 19: "Highlights of Ops", 16 Dec 44); and the dumping of engineer stores and ammunition requirements - the latter were estimated at 30,000 tons - (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 120, folio 2) was under way on 19 Dec. (Ibid, December 1944:

30 Corps to First Cdn Army, 19 0950A Dec 44). Meanwhile, road companies were at work along all the principal communication lines and in the forward assembly areas beyond Mook and Grave.

93. The assembly of the assault formations from 8 and 12 Corps sectors of Second British Army in their initial concentration areas within First Cdn Army - a complicated operation involving the movement by night and under wireless silence of approximately 16,600 vehicles - began on 17 Dec (Ibid, March 1945: Appx 120, folio 31) following the establishment of a special grouping control Headquarters. (Ibid, folios 26-27). 2 Cdn Corps Troops vacated the Mill - St. Hubert area on 17 Dec and moved to Boxtel. On the same day H.Q. 53 (W.) Div, its administration group, and two infantry brigade groups concentrated at Turnhout and Herenthals. 43 (W.) Div and 34 Brit Tk Bde were expected to concentrate in the Boxtel - Tilburg area on 18/19 Dec, (Ibid, folio 31), but, early in the evening of 18 Dec, their move to the north was suddenly postponed and they were ordered to concentrate beyond the Meuse at Hasselt and St. Brie. (Ibid, December 1944: Appx 124, Exfor to First Cdn Army, 18 1920 A Dec 44). At the same time the move of the Gds Armd Div, which was then in position to the east of the river line, was checked. A decision concerning the further movement of these formations was expected on 19 Dec. (Ibid, Exfor to Second Army, 18 1920A Dec 44)

THE ENEMY DELAYS "VERITABLE"

94. This abrupt interruption of the grouping schedule for Operation "VERITABLE" was prompted by a serious deterioration in the Allied position in the 12. U.S. Army Group sector to the east of the Ardennes. On 16 Dec von Rundstedt had suddenly unleashed his Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies and sent them crashing through the forward line of the First U.S. Army between Duren and Trier. As the German Panzers broke through the surprised and ill-prepared American formations and thundered on into Belgium, it became evident that the German assault was "of the most serious import." "The great hour has struck", proclaimed the German C.-in-C. West in a document captured on 16 Dec. "Counter-attacking forces are advancing... What we are going to lose in sweat during the following weeks, we will save in blood during the next few months." (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 169, 16 Dec 44). Three days later, spearheads were operating in the area of Laroche, Marche, and Hotton. Here the enemy was more than 35 miles beyond his start line and within striking distance of Liege, Namur, Dinant, Sedan and the other historic crossings of the Meuse. Should he force the river line in strength, directing his main push on Antwerp, the Allied position in the west, and that of 21 Army Group in particular, would be jeopardized.

95. Appreciating this situation, the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, telephoned the G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, at five o'clock on the afternoon of 19 Dec and informed him that the enemy's penetration of the First U.S. Army front was "deep and, potentially, serious". He had, therefore, "decided to make immediate redispositions in 21 Army Group in order to secure its right flank". (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 3, Memorandum 1-0-4/1, 19 Dec 44). H.Q. 30 Brit Corps was to move to Hasselt that night and, with 43 (W.) Inf, 53 (W.) Inf and Gds Armd Divs, to come under

command Second British Army on arrival. Lt-Gen Horrocks, G.O.C. 30 Brit Corps, would report to the Tactical Headquarters of Second British Army forthwith. 51 (H.) Div - one brigade was then deployed in the Nijmegen salient, while the remainder of the Division was in the process of moving from Boxtel to its forward concentration area at Boxmeer - "was to be put together in [the] Canadian Army area," and to remain under command "ready for a quick move and transfer to Second British Army". (Ibid). 33 Brit Armd Bde, then in 1 Brit Corps reserve, was to move on 20 Dec to link up with 53 (W.) Div and to come under command 30 Corps. (Ibid)

96. The withdrawal of 51 (H.) Div and 33 Brit Armd Bde necessitated a considerable re-organization of the Canadian Army front. In 2 Cdn Corps, the one brigade of 51 (H.) Div which was then employed in the bridgehead was replaced on 20 Dec by a second brigade of 49 (W.R.) Div. The third West Riding brigade remained in the Nijmegen area in reserve. In the city itself "Brockforce" (2 Kensingtons (M.G.) less two M.M.G. coys and three mortar pls, but plus "D" Coy, the A. Tk pl, and one sec 3" mortars of 2 R.S.F., and with various A.A. and S.L. elements in support) assumed the responsibility for the local protection of the bridges from 2 Derby Yeo. (First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 20 Dec 44)

97. In 1 Brit Corps a major re-organization of the Corps front was required in order to provide for the relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div for employment in the role of Army Reserve. This was accomplished on 20/21 Dec, as follows:

- (a) 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt relieved 1 Pol Armd Div in the sector Geertruidenberg - Moerdijk, and was itself relieved in its former sector by 62 A. Tk Regt;
- (b) 10 Pol Armd Bde Gp relieved 4 Cdn Armd Bde along the line Lith - Bokhoven; and
- (c) 3 Pol Inf Bde relieved 10 Cdn Inf Bde in the Heusden - Waspik sector.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "E", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 24, 20 Dec 44)

98. On the afternoon of 21 Dec 4 Cdn Armd Div concentrated to the south and south-east of 's Hertogenbosch with its Headquarters at Boxtel and the remainder of the Division deployed in the area Vught - Schijnel - Oisterwijk and Best. (4 Cdn Armd Div Hist Offr's Summary, week 17-23 Dec 44). In its role as Army Reserve, the Division was on six hours' notice to move. For the time being, however, it remained under the immediate command of 1 Brit Corps. (Ibid). 24 L. of 10 Pol Armd Bde was nominated Corps Reserve and stationed at Teteringen, where it was to support, with one squadron each, the right and centre squadrons of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt. (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "E", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 24). A further provision for the Geertruidenberg - Moerdijk sector was to take effect on 22 Dec, with 1 Belg Fus Bn (less two companies) coming under command 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, and 90 Fd Regt, one troop of 65 Med Regt, and 240 Fd Coy R.E. in support. (Ibid: Appx "F", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 25, 20 Dec 44)

99. Before this deployment took place, however, the Corps was put on the alert by the sudden threat of enemy action from north of the Maas. The Army Intelligence Summary of 21 Dec thus reported the situation:

The evidence is reasonably conclusive that the enemy is preparing a large paratroop operation to take place very shortly, to disrupt the communications of the armies dependent on Antwerp and Brussels. It is abundantly clear that there are paratroops in German Holland, and that their movements tie in to this design. It is equally clear that were the Ardennes plans to succeed to the extent that the enemy crossed the Meuse between Liege K 43 and Givet O 97 in force, a para landing behind our forces opposing him would assist him immeasurably and might, in the longer view, disorganize our offensive plans. Similarly such a landing in the rear areas of First Canadian Army and Second Army might reasonably be expected to delay the movement of reserves to the Ardennes battle, which Sertorius expects.

100. That paratroops had been active in North Holland since the Arnhem battles was a fact thoroughly familiar to Army Intelligence. Thus 6 Para Div had emerged from the training area about Coevorden, Enschede and Zwolle on 20-24 Nov to relieve 333 Inf and 10 S.S. Pz Divs in the bridgehead salient, and between the end of November and 11 Dec both 3 and 5 Para Divs were known to have left North Holland for the battlefields at Duren and Aachen. On 21 Dec 2 Para Div, less one regiment, 7 Para, and large numbers of recently arrived G.A.F. personnel were more or less confidently placed in the general area to the north of the Neder-Rijn. (Ibid)

101. Against this general background recent information for the period 15-21 Dec looked especially alarming. "Six reports from four different sources which previously have proven reliable in similar matters", were to the effect that

... four para divisions are preparing a large operation on "North Brabant" or on Brussels, Antwerp and communication lines, that the airfields at Soesterberg E 39 and Deelen E 78 are to be used very shortly for take off, that paratroops have moved into Baarn Z 30, Soest E 39, Dribergen E 38, Doorn E 38, Culemborg E 2776 (300) and Zeist E 39 (5000), that Generals Student, Christiansen and Rheinhardt came to Hilversum about 10 Dec and have been in secret talks with staff officers in buildings to which the normal Wehrmacht is NOT admitted.

(Ibid)

102. Airfields mentioned were only partially serviceable on 16 and 26 Nov - no more recent photo cover was then available - but, from the precedent of a recent 'drop' in the Ardennes, it was estimated that the enemy had available in the theatre "at least ninety suitable planes giving a maximum lift of about 1,000 at a time". (Ibid)

The conclusion drawn from this evidence was as follows:

It can all be fitted into a picture which has its place in an enemy design to drive to Antwerp from the Ardennes. Into the same frame fits the vastly increased V effort directed at Antwerp. Without a land operation, reasonably likely to reach the area, it is only a possible and NOT a probable operation. But it is being prepared and must be provided against.

(Ibid)

103. The receipt of this warning provoked an immediate reaction in 1 Brit Corps. All units and sub-units were put on the alert, garrison commanders were appointed to co-ordinate the defences of Breda - Ginnekin, Roosendaal, and Bergen-op-Zoom and orders were issued for the formation on 22 Dec of a Corps mobile reserve which would be commanded by the C.C.R.A. and would consist of the reserve squadron of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 24 L., and 47 (R.M.) Cdo. (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "G", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 26, 21 Dec 44). 24 L. was to remain at Teteringen, while the reserve squadron of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt and 47 (R.M.) Cdo - which moved to under command 1 Brit Corps on 21 Dec (W.D., G.S. (Plans), H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 19, "Minutes", 22 Dec 44) - were to concentrate in the eastern and western outskirts of Breda respectively. Special attention was called to the roads Oosterhout - Geertruidenberg and Zevenbergasche - Moerdijk, Gilze airfield, and the general south-western portion of the Corps sector as the areas most likely to be the targets of enemy airborne operations. (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "G", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 26, 21 Dec 44)

104. Further and "unmistakable" evidence of the enemy's offensive operations opposite the Corps sector was reported in the Intelligence Summary for 23 Dec:

Undoubtedly there has been an influx of enemy recently into the area between the Maas and the Waal and between the Biesbosch and the Isle of Alem E 3577. Source puts their strength as high as 10,000; they are crowded into all the villages and are said to be very optimistic and reckless. There has been greatly increased activity on the Maas ferries, with new construction, and the Crossing Staff North, which it will be remembered was set up for 88 Corps' withdrawal over the rivers, has been expanded and received further telephone resources. Engineers and their material are being assembled: rubber boats, bridging material and amphibious cars; charges are removed from bridges and obstacles from roads. 20 armoured cars and 15 medium tanks, which may of course be assault guns, have been seen at Gorinchem E 06, and a divisional staff has arrived at Woudrichem E 1160. The troops talk quite freely of an impending crossing of the Maas and a drive to recapture Antwerp.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 176, 23 Dec 44)

105. The Division in question was thought to be 711, as the identification on 23 Dec of 51 Flieger Regt in the sector previously held by 744 G.R. in the Bokhoven area suggested that at least a part of this formation had been withdrawn for refitting. 712, or mountain troops or Austrians, both of which had been mentioned in some reports, were also candidates for the probable assault role. Photo reconnaissance of the airfields on 23 Dec revealed that they were still unserviceable for a large-scale operation, but despite this evidence it was considered that the paratroop threat remained. (Ibid)

106. On 23 Dec three units were detached from 4 Cdn Armd Div. 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) was moved into Corps Reserve, 8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt passed to under command of the Tilburg Garrison, and the Linc & Welld R. moved under Corps command to Loon-op-Zand (4 Cdn Armd Div Hist Offr's Summary, week 17-23 Dec 44) where, in a special reserve role, it was to ensure that the Tilburg road was kept clear north of the Tilburg canal, to hold Loon-op-Zand as a firm base, and to oppose any enemy incursions from north of the Maas between Boardwijk and Raamsdonk which might prove beyond the resources of the forward battalions of 1 Pol Armd Div. (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "G", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 26, 21 Dec 44)

107. Meanwhile, the general situation on the Allied front had clarified, and on 20 Dec the C.-in-C. outlined the implications of the German counter-offensive for 21 Army Group to the Commanders of First Cdn and Second Brit Armies. General Crerar later commented on this conference:

The C-in-C was inclined to the view that the northern flank of the enemy's breakthrough in the Ardennes was being held along the general line Bullange - Stavelot - Durbuy, and that in the south the line through Echternach - Diekirch and the particularly important area of Bastogne had been firmly established. On the previous night, however, advanced elements of the enemy's armour had penetrated west as far as Marche and at that time there were no American formations between them and the River Meuse. The C-in-C stated that he considered it to be of paramount importance to hold the line of the Meuse and he had already taken steps to secure all crossings and crossing places between Liege and Givet with British armoured troops under the direct command of Main Headquarters, 21st Army Group. This responsibility would, shortly be taken over by Lt-General Dempsey whom he requested at once to secure and cover the crossings of the Meuse from Namur to the east. The C-in-C added that he would like the 30th British Corps to concentrate in the area about Hasselt, St Trond and Louvain.

Field Marshal Montgomery went on to inform us that by agreement with the Supreme Commander, made a few hours previously, the Ninth and First U.S. Armies, the latter less the 8th U.S. Corps, had come under his command. The new right boundary of this reinforced 21st Army Group he anticipated as being a general line to include Givet eastwards to Cologne. Further decisions

by the Supreme Allied Commander provided for the organization of a counter-stroke against the southern flank of the enemy penetration by Lt-General Patton's Third U.S. Army. While the C-in-C intended if at all possible, to organize a strategic reserve from U.S. forces in the First and Ninth U.S. Armies for a similar operation from the north, he said that Lt-General Dempsey was to be prepared to use the 30th British Corps in a counter-offensive role as far south as Givet. Until the situation clarified and improved, it was his firm intention at all costs to prevent the enemy from crossing the Meuse, in any strength, along this front.

The C-in-C suggested that, in the circumstances, it might be desirable that Lt-General Dempsey pass over command of the 3rd British Infantry Division to me and that the line of the Meuse down to Helmond - Venlo railway should become the responsibility of First Canadian Army, an arrangement in which Lt-General Dempsey readily concurred. But if the situation confronting the Allied Armies were to improve materially within the next few days, as seemed possible, and the Second British Army did not become involved in the counter-offensive on the right flank, the C-in-C intimated that it was quite probable that the Headquarters of the 30th British Corps and several divisions would be returned to my command in order that the original plans for First Canadian Army should proceed without loss of time. With that in view the work of improving communications in the Army area, leading to the Nijmegen salient, would be strenuously carried on.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
December 1944: Appx 4, "Notes",
20 Dec 44)

108. Three days later, however, in view of the information accumulated by Intelligence since 20 Dec, the G.O.C.-in-C. "appreciated the possibility that the situation held further implications for First Canadian Army." (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45, para 26). Accordingly, on 23 Dec, he issued the following warning to the Commanders of 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps:

Information and evidence increasingly points to active consideration, if not intention, of enemy to carry out a subsidiary operation, both water and airborne, directed against North Brabant and possibly Antwerp. It would appear that the axis Gorinchem - Breda - Antwerp would offer better possible returns on any such enemy effort, but no sector of Canadian Army area can be definitely excluded from such enemy plans.

It must be constantly borne in mind that the enemy is now staking everything he has on the success of the all-out offensive he has launched against First US Army. This maximum scale operation must soon produce very important results, or it will inevitably fail. Such failure would be catastrophic to the enemy.

It follows that subsidiary enemy operations, against other Allied Armies, no matter how desperate, or unpromising they appear to be, will be undertaken if the distraction they produce, in any way, serves to assist him in his main operation.

It is also necessary to realize that no treachery or trickery will be neglected by the enemy, if he considers it will assist his purpose. For instance, if other conditions suited, it is probable that the enemy would select Christmas eve, or Christmas day, or night, for offensive action on the assumption that such timing would be contrary to our own conceptions and he would thereby gain surprise.

Commanders will, therefore, be very much on the alert and the organization and disposition of forces under command will be made to suit the contingencies as described. Plans will be made to deal vigorously and decisively with any enemy penetration of outpost positions and FDLs and, at the same time, to contain localize and mop-up any landings of enemy paratroops in Div, Corps and Army rear areas.

The steps taken will include the organized defence of all centres of communication, either by troops normally located in such areas, or by forces specially designated. Provision of local and general reserves will be made. Good arrangements for wireless inter-communication between Headquarters at all levels will be assured, in case line communications fail, or are destroyed. Additional local reserves of ammunition, POL and supplies will be dumped.

4 Cdn Armd Div, less certain detachments already detailed, will be in Canadian Army reserve, in Bostel area, and will be at six hours notice to move, until further orders.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army.
December 1944: Appx 5, Letter
1-0-4/1, 23 Dec 44)

109. The receipt of General Crerar's message of 23 Dec was followed by the immediate reorganization of both Corps sectors. In 2 Cdn Corps, 3 Cdn Inf Div with under command 5 Cdn Inf Bde of 2 Cdn Inf Div assumed responsibility for the defence of the whole Reichswald sector on the morning of 26 Dec, and at the same time 2 Cdn Inf Div, less one brigade, moved into Corps Reserve in the area Hatert - Heumen. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, less one squadron, was placed in support of 3 Cdn Inf Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, December 1944: Appx 26, GO 107, 24 1700A Dec 44)

110. The parallel regrouping of 1 Brit Corps was designed "to meet more effectively any possible crossing attempt by the enemy in the area between Heusden and Geertruidenberg." (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "K", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 27, 24 Dec 44). 47 (R.M.) Cdo ceased to be under command the Corps mobile reserve on 24 Dec and, with under command "C" Sqn 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, two companies of 1 Belg Fus Bn, one troop

less one section of 247 A.Tk Bty, and with 90 Fd Regt in support, assumed responsibility under the command of 1 Pol Armd Div for a sub-sector extending from the left boundary of 1 Pol Armd Div along the Geertruidenberg - Oosterhout canal. 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, now minus two squadrons, and two additional companies of 1 Belg Fus Bn, but with one squadron of 24 L. and 90 Fd Regt in support, remained in its former sector. In the Corps mobile reserve ("Paddy Force") 19 Cdn Fd Regt replaced 90 Fd Regt. Finally, the Corps artillery was redeployed in order that maximum fire could be brought to bear on the area from exclusive Heusden to exclusive Geertruidenberg. (Ibid)

111. While the reorganization of 1 Brit Corps was in progress, the G.O.C.-in-C. redeployed the Army Reserve. On 23 Dec the Lake Sup R. (Mot) and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt was detached from 4 Cdn Armd Div for employment in a special Army reserve role in the area Vught - Boxtel, and that night the Division itself was put on two hours' notice. (4 Cdn Armd Div Hist Offr's Summary, Week 17-23 Dec 44). On the following day "as a further precaution" it was moved into the area to the south and east of Breda where, under direct command of 1 Brit Corps, it deployed behind the Wilhelmina canal, prepared to meet the threat of an enemy thrust across the Maas in the general area Dongen - Oosterhout, and to deny to the enemy the use of communications linking Oosterhout with Breda and Tilburg and those running south from Breda to Antwerp. (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45, para 28)

112. The immediate Christmas period passed without incidence. The usual festivities were duly observed, although many had to be hastily improvised in strange surroundings, and not a few were held rather "after the event." "All formations and units of First Cdn Army remained in a high state of readiness" (Ibid, para 29) but morale was also high, as witnessed the intention expressed by H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps for 25 Dec:

2 Cdn Corps though festive, will
hold tight as hell from Elst to Mill;
while pushing piles and grouping guns
will hold the line against the Hun.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps,
December 1944: Appx 26, GO 109,
24 2210A Dec 44)

113. Meanwhile, the German offensive appeared to have lost its momentum. On 28 Dec the Commanders of First and Ninth U.S. Armies and those of First Cdn and Second Brit Armies were summoned to a further conference on the general situation at Tac H.Q. 21 Army Group.

The C-in-C stated that the situation in the Ardennes had greatly improved in the past few days, owing largely to the very fine resistance put up by the American forces in Bastogne, St Vith and Malmedy. He had the 6th British Airborne Division, with the 29th Armoured Brigade under command, deployed along the line of the Meuse, and felt certain that the enemy could not now drive west across the river. He appreciated the necessity, however, of holding the front through Marche, Hotton and Grandmesnil against a probable renewal of the offensive by the German Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies directed north on Liege. He anticipated

that the enemy would carry out small attacks on the left of the First U.S. Army and against the Ninth U.S. Army, and he expected threats, and indications of operations, on the fronts of the Second British and First Canadian Armies. He considered that these would be entirely subsidiary and subsequent to the main and primary thrust which he expected to develop in the Ardennes within the next few days. This we were already well positioned to meet, and on the right the First U.S. Army was now organizing for an intended counter-offensive. The re-grouping had been accomplished without the actual intermingling of British and American formations in the fighting, a situation which he was glad to have avoided, both for administrative reasons, and because he did not wish to commit the British formations too deeply in view of the future requirements of First Canadian Army.

In the meantime, in order to free the First U.S. Army from all anxiety as to the area west and south-west of its offensive right wing (the 7th Corps), the C-in-C arranged that the Second British Army should take over the front between Marche and Givet with the 30th British Corps. Lt-General Dempsey would thus have responsibilities on the right as well as on the left (with the 12th and 8th Corps) of the First and Ninth U.S. Armies, but as those on the line of the Meuse were in a prospective rather than an active operational role, this inconvenience could be temporarily accepted. The C-in-C confirmed his intention of later transferring the 30th Corps, and the several British formations previously planned to be under its command, to First Canadian Army in order that the offensive from the Nijmegen salient should be launched as speedily and forcefully as possible.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
December 1944: Appx 6, G.O.C.-in-C.,
O-1-O, 28 Dec 44)

114. Returning to his own Headquarters, General Crerar was once again confronted with evidence which posed a problem of more immediate importance to First Cdn Army than the remounting of Operation "VERITABLE". For information collected by 27 Dec was now integrated and it presented a well defined picture of a potential enemy offensive:

Over one hundred items of information dealing directly or indirectly with an attack south across the Maas have been received since 22 December.

With the reconnaissance of Pereboom E 05 today confirming the stories consistently told by all the civilian sources...

... Prior to 8 December when officers left for a meeting in Germany there were no offensive intentions in the island south of Gorinchem E 16. On their return things began to happen. By 14 December troops were pouring back into the

island. Paratroops were on the move to Soesterberg E 39 airfield. Thereafter the preparations for a waterborne and airborne operation proceeded side by side.

A secret planning HQ was reported to be functioning at Hilversum Z 20 from 5 December. There Generals Student, Christiansen, Reinhardt, a GAF general and an engineer general were reported in daily conference. Later Reinhardt's HQ was reported at Gameraen E 25 on the island although he was still reported at the conferences in Hilversum. Finally the message which the cadet saw and which is now accepted referred to a feint at Halderon E 76 to "cover up a proper attack by 88 Corps."

Thus we have a Corps battle involving as far as can be seen 711 Div whose regimental commanders have their HQ on the island in the centre of the flak country. We have also some indication of 711 and 712 Divisions drawing back to refit. But they offer no great offensive strength. On 19 December 6 Para Division started to move to Gameraen bringing bridging equipment to add to that already detected on the island. Its move continued at least to the night 25/26 December when it was reported at Culemborg.

On 23 December troops of 346 Div on the west started to come in and move forward.

Thus we appear to have the nucleus of an assault force in 6 Para Div, with lower grade infantry from 711 and 346 Divisions also available. We have 88 Corps resources including possibly some from 712 Div. It is NOT a strong force but it has shown itself bold and vigorous in its patrolling. Its morale is high and it is anxious to be on the road to Antwerp.

It is contained in the area behind Pereboom E 0451 and Well E 2552. Its preparations seem to be concentrated on crossings at Pereboom and Heusden E 2052 as indeed they must if the peril of a double water crossing is to be avoided. Its gun areas lie forward of the line Almkerk E 05 - Aalst E 2056. Behind that line its AA is concentrated most on the vital bridge still intact east of Giesen E 1358. It is based on the ferries across the Merwede, but to a greater degree on the Zaltbommel road bridge E 2960. The AA defences tell the tale.

We do not know the time of attack. It appears to be reaching a crescendo of preparation now but the actual timing must depend on the events in the south.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 180,
27 Dec 44)

This picture was developed still further when reports of photo sorties on 28 Dec revealed a considerable increase in flak and field artillery since 16 Dec, and several sources reported that the equivalent of half a divisional artillery had arrived at Geldermalsen. Other information received that day concerned

vehicle movement at Tiel and Heusden and in the area of the Culemborg bridge. (Ibid, No. 181, 28 Dec 44)

115. The principal sensation of 28 Dec was, however, the report of a 'reliable source' on enemy activity on the island of Schouwen:

He stated that the garrison was now 3500 as against the highest previous figure of 1700. There were concentrations of troops reported in Zieriksee D3645 Schuddebeurs D3748 Vianen D4242 Brouwershaven D3654 Staart D4448 Oosterland D4445. At Staart and Vianen there are considerable numbers of rubber boats. Along the south coast there are numbers of small outboard motor boats each capable of carrying 20 men. There are guns, mortars and smoke projectors at Zijpe D4845. A large gun is reported east or south-east of Zieriksee. As elsewhere, they talk of a possible attack this time, on the haven opposite Zijpe, Stavenisse D4238 and North Beveland D3040.

(Ibid)

It is apparent that Army Intelligence considered this report evidence of a genuine threat:

The story of an attack from Schouwen and in all likelihood Overflakkee is accepted, not alone because of the reliability of the source, but because we know how eager the enemy has been to learn about this front and particularly the ports of Tholen, Scherpennisse D4833 Stavenisse D4238 St Annaland D4839 and further north Dintelsas D4839. He also wants to know the communications of the island with the mainland, the state of flooding west of the line Bergen-op-Zoom - Willemstad D7249 and general information about the adjacent mainland. The enemy is reported to be ready from now on.

(Ibid)

116. Armoured reconnaissance of Schouwen on 29 Dec tended to support the story of the 'reliable source', and on 30 Dec the island was still "a front-page attraction". Further, on the night 28/29 Dec enemy artillery on Schouwen had shelled Walcheren and North-Beveland, our own troops reporting the enemy fire "very accurate". (Ibid, No. 183, 30 Dec 44)

117. Finally, the enemy reinforcement in the Altena area had continued "in full vigour." (Ibid) A "very reliable source" reported 28,000 troops south of the Waal in the built-up area as of 29 Dec, while from aerial reconnaissance of the period 28-29 Dec a further increase of 95 anti-aircraft and field guns was noted, new bridges had appeared, old ones showed as repaired, and there was evidence of an administrative build-up in the Geldermalsen area. (Ibid)

118. In the light of the information received up to and including 28 Dec, the G.O.C.-in-C. re-assessed the situation on the Army front:

I appreciated that his main thrust, should he be successful in establishing a bridgehead south of

the river, would be on a line through Oosterhout and Breda to Antwerp. I had also to anticipate a secondary thrust to secure 's Hertogenbosch. But there was now evidence of the assembly of an enemy force of the approximate strength of a brigade group on the islands of Schouwen and Overflakkee and of an intention to use it to develop diversionary waterborne attacks on the mainland from Willsmstad to the peninsula of St Phillipsland and against the island of Tholen. These diversions might well be timed to take place before the principal operation across the river.

While I had thought previously that such enemy operations against the sector of First Canadian Army held by the 1st British Corps would be dependent upon, and timed to follow successes won by the enemy in the Ardennes, it now seemed wise to abandon this preconception. It was now necessary to assume that the German High Command would initiate determined water and airborne operations across North Brabant even if the great German thrust in the south were to fail completely. In an apparently hopeless situation, desperate measures are strongly indicated. This was the general position in which the enemy now found himself.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45, para 33)

119. Following this appreciation, on 29 Dec, the G.O.C.-in-C. made three further changes in the deployment of his troops: 22 Cdn Armd Regt with under command one company of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) and two batteries less one troops of 62 A.Tk Regt assumed responsibility for the St. Philipsland - Tholen sub-sector opposite Schouwen and passed to under command H.Q. 62 A.Tk Regt; 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt with a second company of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) reverted from Army Reserve to command 4 Cdn Armd Div but remained in Vught. (W.D., 1 Brit Corps, December 1944: Appx "L", 1 Corps Op Instr No. 28, 28 Dec 44; and First Cdn Army LO's Reports, 29 Dec 44). The role of Army Reserve was then entrusted to 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, which moved from 2 Cdn Corps into the Bostel area that night. (W.D., G.S. (Plans), H.Q. First Cdn Army, December 1944: Appx 19, "Minutes", 30 Dec 44). A further development of importance on 29 Dec was the extension of the Army right boundary south of Venlo to include the sector of 3 Brit Inf Div of 8 Brit Corps. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, January 1944: "Dec items held for down-grading", First Cdn Army Intention, 28 0730A Dec 44). This Division then passed to under command 2 Cdn Corps, thus completing an arrangement suggested by the C.-in-C. at his conference of 20 Dec but left to the Army Commanders concerned to implement at their convenience.

120. On 30 Dec the G.O.C.-in-C. communicated his revised appreciation of the situation on the Canadian Army front to the C.-in-C. by telephone. His record of the conversation is as follows:

I communicated this appreciation to the C-in-C. by telephone at 9.20 PM on 30 Dec, and informed him that in addition to the troops on Schouwen, the enemy had now deployed his 711th, 712th and 6th Parachute Divisions in the area between the

rivers facing the 1st British Corps and appeared to have another division concentrated north of Zaltbommel. In the event of these forces being thrown across the Maas, I considered that if the weather permitted air operations, I could handle the situation with my existing resources for thirty-six to forty-eight hours. Given the appropriate priority, the RAF would have no great difficulty in severely disorganizing the enemy's plans. But if the weather favoured the enemy, in view of the fact that my positions were thinly held, I said that I considered it desirable that I should have another infantry division placed at my disposal. The C-in-C agreed that the full resources of the 84th Tactical Group RAF should be brought to bear on the enemy's concentrations of boats and barges on the river and about the islands, and that, if definitely necessary, he could place the Guards Armoured Division at my disposal.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45,
para 34)

121. On the last day of the year the G.O.C.-in-C. addressed to the Corps Commanders a new directive in which he reviewed the whole situation with reference to the enemy build-up in the Altena area and on the coastal islands, and added:

Owing to present commitments on the Southern sector of 21 Army Group, further formations cannot presently be made available to First Canadian Army. The prospective tactical problems will therefore need to be solved, certainly in the earlier stages, by the formations now comprised in First Canadian Army. It is most important, also, to solve such problems without dangerously compromising our ability later to launch Operation "VERITABLE". In other words, 2 Cdn Corps requires to be so disposed, and in such strength, that it can successfully maintain its present forward defended localities.

Although small scale enemy patrols and "prods" may be expected to take place along the frontage now held by 2 Cdn Corps, it is not considered that the enemy now has the additional forces at his disposal to develop a general or important attack against that formation. While, therefore, it is necessary for 2 Cdn Corps tenaciously to hold its present forward posts and localities, especially those to the North, East and South-East of Nijmegen, and eject from these any enemy who may penetrate them, the organization of local, rather than of any general, reserves, should meet the prospective situation.

On the other hand, in order to meet the contingency of a considerable enemy penetration on the front of 1 Brit Corps, North of the road 's Hertogenbosch - Tilburg - Breda, it is necessary that a sizeable, general reserve be formed under command First Canadian Army.

To meet this requirement, Comd 2 Cdn Corps will be prepared, at twenty-four hours notice, to build up the present Canadian Army reserve in the Boxel -

St Oedenrode - Best area from 4 Cdn Inf Bde Group, to the following:

- 2 Cdn Inf Div - less one Inf Bde
- 2 Cdn Armd Bde - less one Armd Regt

The General concluded his directive on a note of optimism:

It is quite possible that, under conditions favourable to him, the enemy may succeed in landing considerable forces on the South bank of R Maas and in establishing one or more shallow bridgeheads. It is quite certain, however, that with determination and vigour he can be prevented from effecting a high rate of build-up and an extension of such bridgeheads. In such circumstances, any situations which may develop should be capable of speedy solution by the resources presently available.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, December 1944; Appx 7, Memo to Comds 1 Brit & 2 Cdn Corps., 1-0-4/1, 31 Dec 44)

122. The last few days of the month brought an increase in the enemy's patrol activity along the whole of the Army front. From 1 Dec 44 to 3 Jan 45, a total of 91 enemy patrols were reported. Of this number 58 were in the 1 Brit Corps sector, 19 in the bridgehead salient and 14 in the Reichswald. In the light of his known intentions for the latter part of this period, the following record of his most active efforts has a particular interest:

(a) 1 Brit Corps

<u>Date</u>	<u>Patrols Reported</u>
21 Dec	5
22 Dec	6
24 Dec	3
26 Dec	3
29 Dec	6
2 Jan	4

(b) 2 Cdn Corps

<u>Arnhem - Nijmegen Salient</u>		<u>Reichswald Sector</u>	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Patrols Reported</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Patrols Reported</u>
17 Dec	4		
27 Dec	6		
29 Dec	3		
		31 Dec	3
		1 Jan	4
		2 Jan	7

123. Our own patrols in the same period numbered 72. Fifty (of which 21 were river crossings) were sent out by 1 Brit Corps, and 22 by 2 Cdn Corps. Of the latter, 11 were in the Island salient, nine in the Reichswald, and two (between 2 and 3 Jan) in the Wansum sector of 3 Brit Inf Div.

124. The last week of the year was one of "alarms and excursions", not the least of which were occasioned by the enemy night-fighters which had appeared over the Army front in increasing numbers from 26 Dec. On the night 26/27 Dec the enemy paid particular attention to Gilze airfield and provoked a flurry of excitement which resulted in the Tilburg Garrison being put on the alert. 2 Sqn, 1315 Wing had reverted to the R.A.F. Regiment from under command 1 Pol Armd Div that day, but additional measures for the defence of the airstrip were considered necessary and on 30/31 Dec the greater part of 21 Cdn Armd Regt plus one company of A. & S.H. of C. were moved into the area.

THE ENEMY HITS BACK

125. Meanwhile, as First Cdn Army gathered itself to meet the impending threat from the north-east, the Allied fortunes on the Ardennes Front were showing signs of taking a brighter turn. The good weather which had begun on 24 Dec had afforded to the air forces a golden opportunity of which they took full advantage. But although tremendous damage was done to the enemy's supply lines and to his concentrations in the Salient itself, heavy fighting continued. (Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 222). The enemy's armour now appeared to be massing in the vicinity of Houffalize with the object of blocking the Allied counter-thrust (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 185, 1 Jan 45). The C.-in-C., who had, as yet, been unable to form a reserve American corps for his offensive programme in First U.S. Army, had decided to commit the British troop and relieve VII U.S. Corps by 2 Jan. This Corps could then be launched on Houffalize from the north the following day to join up with General Patton's corresponding drive, also directed on Houffalize, from the Bastogne sector in the south. (Montgomery, op cit, p. 222)

126. On New Year's Day, the G.A.F. staged a major surprise. It mounted its first large-scale daylight offensive in the west since the Battle of Britain. Some 250 F.W. 190s, M.E. 109s and 262s were active over the Army Group sector, raiding the airfields at Woensdrecht, Gilze, Antwerp, Brussels and Eindhoven. According to first estimates, some 31 to 43 enemy aircraft were shot down or destroyed in combat, compared with our casualties of 32 Spitfires destroyed on the ground and two missing after battle. Later figures, however, showed that our air forces and anti-aircraft batteries had been quick to take up the challenge, with the satisfying result that some 120 out of the 250 enemy aeroplanes originally committed were shot down, whilst our own losses in combat were 12 machines in addition to those destroyed on the airfields. (R.A.F. 83 Gp Int Summary Nos. 196 and 197, 1 and 2 Jan 45, Part II, p. 1)

THE FIRST CDN ARMY FRONT, 1-7 JAN 45

127. The Canadian Army front saw little activity on these cold, clear days.* On 1 Jan the build-up in the Altena area was still receiving prime consideration, although information was beginning to filter through to the effect that the enemy concentrations were diminishing. The constant watch was, however, kept up. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 185, para 2, 1 Jan 45). In 1 Brit Corps' section, on the western flank,

* A Map showing dispositions of First Cdn Army on 1 Jan 45 appears at Appx "C".

the broad lengths of flooded dykelands were under unceasing observation from Halsteren, whence 22 Cdn Armd Regt with one company of Lake Sup R. (Mot) operated towards Tholen to the east and Steenberg and the St. Philipsland Peninsula to the north. (W.D., 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Jan 45). Eastwards from here, elements of 62 A.Tk Regt, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 47 and 48 (R.M.) Cdos patrolled vigorously into German territory. (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitreps, folios Nos. 96, 94 and 93). From here the line became the responsibility of 1 Pol Armd Div, who held the front from Waspik on the extreme left to Lith, north-east of 's Hertogenbosch. The one particular note of interest in this area was the great deal of movement reported in the region of Kapelscheveer (AEF/45/1 Pol Armd Div/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep No. 3, 1 Jan 45). It was here that the enemy had an outpost on the Allied side of the river, and during the afternoon of 1 Jan he boldly ferried across two S.P. guns and began to shell the Polish outposts. (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep, folio No. 96). The Poles immediately reinforced their positions with tanks and engaged Kapelscheveer with artillery, whereupon the situation calmed once more. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 7, Ops Log, 1 Jan 45, Serial 22). To the rear 4 Cdn Armd Div's battle groups concentrated in Corps reserve, 4 Cdn Armd Bde in the area Chaam - Meerle - Rijbagen and 10 Cdn Inf Bde near Rijen and Dorst, with detached units at Vught, and Loon-op-Zand. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, and H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Jan 45)

128. In the Nijmegen Salient, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div, holding the left flank of 2 Cdn Corps, was experiencing the dull routine of keeping the flooded land under observation. On the extreme left, the divisional reconnaissance squadrons watched over the scattered farms, while to the north of Nijmegen town, patrols and exchanges of fire with small groups of German infantry who held the various strongholds in the watery area marked the average day. (AEF 45/49 (W.R.) Inf Div/C/H: Sitreps, folios 60, 51 and 52, January 1945)

129. On 3 Cdn Inf Div's front, 5, 7, 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes kept as close a contact as conditions permitted and carried out an extensive patrol programme, which was urged on by the thought (at Divisional Headquarters) that the enemy was withdrawing (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 31 Dec 44). The patrols carried out by 5 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes, however, dispelled this view. The German reaction in early January against 5 Cdn Inf Bde, especially, was most violent and costly to the Cdn Infantry. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Jan 45)

130. 2 Cdn Inf Div was on 12 hours' notice to move as part of First Cdn Army Reserve. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 31 Dec 44). Its advance party, consisting of 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, had been in Boxel since 29 Dec (AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D: Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities, 31 Dec 44 - 6 Jan 45). 5 Cdn Inf Bde, less R. de Mais, who were in Cuijk, was under command 3 Cdn Inf Div, helping to hold the four-brigade front (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Jan 45), while 6 Cdn Inf Bde continued in its role of mobile reserve in the areas of Mook (Cameron's of C.), Malden - Molenhoek (Fus M.R.) and Klooster (S. Sask R.). (Ibid). 8 Cdn Recce Regt and a portion of Tor Scot R. (M.G.) kept watch between Cuijk and Doxmeer (W.D. 8 Cdn Recce Regt, January 1945). Further to the south, 3 Brit Inf Div, with a Dutch Contingent under command, held a line running from Boxmeer to the village of Grubbenvoorst just north of Venlo (AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D: Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities, 31 Dec 44 - 6 Jan 45).

131. The relative quietness of the New Year had been broken only by the appearance of the enemy aircraft over the Allied lines (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945, Appx 1: Ops Log, Serial 5759, 1 Jan 45). Indeed, this action served well, for it reminded the troops, in the Canadian Army sector at least, that the enemy could still hit back and that the state of alarm must not, as yet, be abandoned. While the concentrated effort to break up the German offensives in the Ardennes continued with unrelenting fury and amid appalling ground conditions, First Cdn Army still awaited developments from the Altena threat. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 188, 4 Jan 45, Pt I, para (i)) General Crerar assumed responsibility for Walcheren and the two Bevelands on 3 Jan with a view to consolidating the northern flank defences, and as a result 4 Commando Bde, together with Royal Netherlands Bde and certain anti-aircraft units now came under the unified command of First Cdn Army and were in turn passed to 1 Brit Corps. The Canadian Army front at this stage extended from Venlo on the Meuse to West Kapelle, on Walcheren Island, a total distance of 175 miles (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, January 1945: Gen Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45; and AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep, folio 92, 3 Jan 45)

132. On the same day, in its role of Corps reserve, 4 Cdn Armd Div was ordered to be prepared to counter-attack any enemy penetration south of the Tilburg - Oosterhout road. This involved a further re-grouping, and the division was now sub-divided into three combat teams. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 3 Jan 45) - an armoured brigade group, an infantry brigade group and an additional force made up of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and Lake Sup R. (Mot) less one company (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, January 1945: Appx 13, Counter-Attack Role, 3 Jan 45). Each group was then given several concentration areas to reconnoitre down to the lowest level, so that the counter-thrust might be quickly organized (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 2 Jan 45). This reshuffling involved a move westwards to Etten and Hoeven by the 29 Armd Recce Group, who also positioned elements at Rijsbergen. (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 3 Jan 45)

133. While the newly formed battle groups carried out their detailed reconnaissances, the divisional artillery was called upon by R.A., 1 Brit Corps to supplement the fire power for Operation "TROJAN" (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 4 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Jan 45). This operation, which was designed to force the enemy to disclose his strength in guns and mortars, combined an artillery programme and a river crossing by two platoons of Polish infantry east and west of Heusden (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket I: Weekly Summary of Ops 1-7 Jan 45). The attack went in on 5 Jan, but it produced only poor results, inasmuch as no prisoners were taken (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H: folio 87, 6 Jan 45). The intelligence picture, however, was improved upon and gave evidence that the enemy threat in the north had decreased substantially and that he was evacuating much of his built-up force. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No 191, 6 Jan 45). This news was of special interest to 4 Cdn Armd Div, who on 5 Jan received orders to relieve 1 Pol Armd Div (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Jan 45).

134. On the extreme left of the Corps' front, 47(R.M.) Commando continued their aggressive patrols in the area of Geertruidenberg. The attached troops of 48 Commando now reverted to command of the Commando Brigade and moved to the 4 Commando area (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H: folios 85 and 89, 5 Jan 45). As the result of this exodus, elements of the Dutch and Belgian contingents had to readjust their positions in order to fill in the gaps. (Ibid, folios 90 and 87, 4 and 6 Jan 45)

135. On 7 Jan the Polish sector livened considerably when 9 Pol Inf Bn attacked the east end of Kapelscheveer, where the enemy had established a small but well defended outpost. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket I: Army Ops Log, 7 Jan 45, Serials 9 and 39). Here, after some hours of fierce fighting which cost the Polish troops many casualties nine prisoners were taken and the area cleared. These prisoners provided identifications of major interest, as eight of them were from 3/7 Para Regt of 6 Para Div, concerning whose whereabouts First Cdn Army was most curious (First Cdn Army Int Summary 191, 7 Jan 45).

136. At first light on 8 Jan, Maj-Gen Vokes' 4 Cdn Armd Div began to take over the front line from 1 Pol Armd Div (W.D., H.Q. G.S. Ops, 4 Cdn Armd Div, 8 Jan 45). In the meantime the 2 Cdn Corps sector had remained comparatively inactive, though Nijmegen itself came in for a good deal of attention from enemy aircraft on New Year's Day (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 1 Jan 45, Serial 23). In the far north, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div continued its programme of constant patrolling. On 3 Jan, however, active interest was aroused when the enemy was found to have occupied the Castle at Hemmen and to have barricaded himself in. The South Wales Borderers were immediately ordered to dislodge him (Ibid, 3 Jan 45, Serial 12). The Castle was quickly assaulted by infantry with flame throwers, but since the German troops had fortified the lower part of the building with some guile, the attack did not succeed (Ibid, Serial 15). Tanks were called up, but even these failed to overcome the resistance and the contact fight was temporarily called off (Ibid, Serial 18). Patrols kept up the pressure all along the divisional front, although more than one found its path blocked by mines and booby-trapped buildings (Ibid, Serial 19). The cold weather conditions existing at this time made movement difficult, and considerable hardship was sustained by the many standing outposts (Ibid, 5 Jan 45, Serial 7). Enemy ambushes and counter patrols were frequent (Ibid, 8 Jan 45, Serial 15). The old Castle ruins at Hemmen were the object of many of these forays, but they were eventually evacuated by the enemy, our own troops reporting them burnt out and clear by 7 Jan (Ibid, 6 Jan 45, Serial 11).

137. Further to the south in the Groesbeek sector, 3 Cdn Inf Div maintained its four-brigade front (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Jan 45). The first note of warlike action for the New Year fell upon R.H.C. of 5 Cdn Inf Bde (at the time under command 3 Div) when, at 0700 hrs 1 Jan, the enemy mounted upon them a deliberate attack which caused five casualties and what is more significant, the capture of one of the Highlanders. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 1 Jan 45, Serial 20). The divisional sector as a whole buzzed with patrol activity, for it was believed that the enemy might be pulling back to new positions. (AEF 3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: Weekly Summary of Ops, 30 Dec 44 - 6 Jan 45). However, the costly raids which followed disproved this idea (Ibid, and W.D., 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Jan 45). On the night of 3/4 Jan R.H.C. was relieved by R. de Mais and moved west of the river to join 8 Cdn Recce Regt; R. de Chaud and C. Scot R. still remained in divisional reserve (W.Ds., R. de Chaud, C. Scot R., 4 Jan 45).

138. A mixed force, combining elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt and Tor Scot R. (M.G.), guarded the approaches to the railroad from Cuijk to Boxmeer, where the northern positions of 3 Brit Inf Div began. This divisional area also came in for its share of enemy air activities on 1 Jan. In this sector the aggressiveness of the patrols was by no means confined to our own troops, for on 2 Jan, a strong force of enemy crossed the river and attacked the S. Lancs R. Both sides suffered casualties in this fight, but the British soldiers acquired a prize of notable value in the form of one German officer prisoner. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 2 Jan 45, Serial 13). The enemy seemed persistent in carrying the battle to our side (Ibid, Serial 16). One particular stronghold was discovered in the circular wood just north of Wanssum (Ibid, 3 Jan 45, Serial 13). Consequently, a company attack, supported by S.P. guns, was launched at 0330 hours on 3 Jan. The enemy, over 50 strong, resisted tenaciously but our troops reached the wood and seized 12 prisoners before withdrawing (Ibid). Minor clashes occurred nightly. The area of Wanssum Wood especially attracted plenty of artillery and mortar fire. The Wood was attacked again on 4 Jan, but the enemy's well sited small arms and defensive fire drove back the assaulting parties with heavy casualties. (Ibid, 4 Jan 45, Serial 16). A further effort was put in on 6 Jan, with little success (Ibid, 6 Jan 45, Serial 16), but on 8 Jan the tide turned, and after much hard fighting by 1 Suffolk, supported by 3/4 County of London Yeomanry (T.A.), the area was taken together with 15 prisoners; our own casualties were light (Ibid, 8 Jan 45, Serial 16).

139. During this time 2 Cdn Inf Div had been widely dispersed. 5 Cdn Inf Bde was under command 3 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Bde Gp was in Boxtel. Divisional Headquarters and 6 Bde alone remained intact as the Corps reserve. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 2 Jan 45). Since the enemy offensive in the south, however, encouraged precautionary measures, at 0900 hours on 2 Jan the G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div, accented the emergency by holding an orders group and issuing instructions for the movement of 6 Cdn Inf Bde and Divisional Headquarters to the Tilburg - Boxtel area. This move was to be carried out if the enemy attacked across the Maas, in which case 2 Cdn Inf Div, less 5 Cdn Inf Bde, together with 2 Cdn Armd Bde, less one regiment, would be the Army Reserve, while the major part of 8 Cdn Recce Regt and Tor Scot R. (M.G.) plus one battalion of 5 Cdn Inf Bde were to come under command 2 Cdn Corps (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 2 Jan 45; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 2 Jan 45). On 3 Jan, a minor adjustment of position took place when R.H.C. relieved R. de Mais, allowing the latter unit to revert to command 5 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D., R.H.C., 3 Jan 45). On 7 Jan, however, as if signifying that the "danger" period had passed, 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, with 27 Cdn Armd Regt and attached sub-units, moved back from the area of Boxtel, and reverted to command 2 Cdn Inf Div once again (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jan 45). Patrolling and exchanges of artillery fire continued in mocking monotone of this dull though expectant period. Like so many of the other formations on this extended front 2 Cdn Armd Bde was widely scattered. Though its headquarters remained near H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 10 Cdn Armd Regt was concentrated at Grave, while 6 Cdn Armd Regt was positioned north of Nijmegen as a counter-attack force (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 and 2 Jan 45).

140. Meanwhile the broad overall picture had undergone a satisfying change. On 3 Jan the Allied thrust on Houffalize had gone in, with VII U.S. Corps attacking on the left of First U.S. Army. This onslaught was followed on 4 Jan with a hard drive by 30 Brit Corps on the right. Heavy snowfall and generally bad weather slowed down progress at first, but on 5 Jan the American advance was resumed, with the result that on 7 Jan the enemy's main northern supply route, which ran from Laroche to Vielsalm, was cut south-east of Grandmesnil. 30 Brit Corps' attack on the right secured Bure on 5 Jan, and the high ground to the east of Grimbermont two days later (Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 223). The C.-in-C. summed up the Ardennes situation in the following words:

Following the failure of his repeated attacks launched from the northern side of the salient, the enemy tried to shift his main weight further west and south-west. Essential to this re-disposition, however, was the capture of Bastogne and its road net. The dogged and indeed aggressive defence of Bastogne by the Americans continued to attract enemy divisions away from the northern sector until, by 6 January there were no less than ten divisions, including three SS, fighting round the place. His failure to capture Bastogne was the overdue signal to the enemy that the Ardennes offensive must be called off. Sound appreciation would have told him that if the Meuse were not reached quickly, it would not be reached at all; obstinacy, and no doubt political pressure, made him keep up the attack for three weeks and pledge the whole of his strategic reserve in the effort.

(Ibid, pp 223 and 224)

141. Despite the C.-in-C's. comments, however, Intelligence continued to uphold the possibility of the Altena threat:

The situation on the Army front may be summed up as follows. The old line-up from WEST to EAST of 346, 711, 712, 2 Para, 84, 180, 190 no longer obtains. More than 346 appears to be active in the islands and the move of some of 346 into the GORINCHEM E0962 area has NOT been specifically reversed. 711 has already pulled out and is eagerly awaited down SOUTH. It is possible that 2 Mountain and 6 Parachute Divisions may be in the BIESBOSCH and ALTENA. 712 appears concentrated in the BOMMELERWARD; the troops at TIEL are a mystery, as is the set up of 2 Para. Further SOUTH 7 Para has been missing for some time. We have NO modern or confirmed knowledge of what is behind the REICHSWALD.

It is clear that the enemy intends to hold and distract us in HOLLAND and NOT by an intelligence telephone battle only. There is still a threat from SCHOUWEN against the other ZEELAND islands and the mainland. The receding threat from the ALTENA resurges if in fact 6 Para and 2 Mountain divisions have come forward

since 28 December. The REICHSWALD is always a potential jumping off place for the glittering prizes of NIJMEGEN and GRAVE bridges.

Just when the ALTENA threat appeared to be dissolving, these new and sinister mysteries of 6 Para and 2 Mountain come to plague us. To the same effect has been the vigour with which the enemy has maintained foot holds on our side of the MAAS, in position NOT vital to defence but to offense. In this area, we need decisive information on the divisions and on the present gun positions across the rivers. Until these are received that front, too, continues to be a local menace.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 192, 8 Jan 45)

THE LEFT FLANK: 1 BRIT CORPS 8-14 JAN 45

142. Over to the west in the area of 1 Brit Corps the events of the first week had resulted in an abnormal re-grouping for the units of 4 Cdn Armd Div and a further reshuffle had been necessary prior to its move into the line on 8 Jan. 4 Cdn Armd Bde now had under command 21 Cdn Armd Regt, Lake Sup R. (Mot) less one company, and two batteries of 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt, with 23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) in support less one battery. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, January 1945: Appx 12, 4 Cdn Armd Div Op Instruction No. 20, Para 5, 5 Jan 45). The 10 Cdn Inf Bde Gp consisted of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, Alq R., A. & S.H. of C. and 10 Cdn Indep M.G. Coy, supported by 15 Cdn Fd Regt (Ibid). As part of the re-grouping, 28 Cdn Armd Regt, Linc & Welld R., together with 14 and 96 Cdn Fd Btys (S.P.), would come under command of the division for operations only and would remain in reserve. 22 Cdn Armd Regt, the one company of Lake Sup R. (Mot) and 36 Cdn Fd Bty (S.P.) would revert to command 4 Div, Lake Sup R. (Mot) and 23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) respectively on 10 Jan. Additional artillery support for the Division was to be furnished by 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) who were to come under command on 9 Jan. 8 Cdn L.A.A. was to remain with the Tilburg garrison (Ibid).

143. On 8 Jan 4 Cdn Armd Bde relieved 1 Pol A.Tk Regt Gp north of 's Hertogenbosch, and 10 Cdn Inf Bde prepared to relieve 3 Pol Inf Bde Gp on 9 Jan. 4 Cdn Armd Div artillery also interchanged positions with its Polish counterpart, while 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt took up positions around Lith. Lake Sup R. (Mot) went into Molenbroek, Orthen and Vlijmen, while 21 Cdn Armd Regt deployed its squadrons to the areas of De Heide and Vlijmen. The following day, 10 Cdn Inf Bde also completed its move without incident. A. & S.H. of C. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt took over Waalwijk. Alq R. positioned itself in and around the moated town of Heusden, while 10 Indep M.G. Coy dug its gun pits at Hoeven (AEF, Weekly Summary of Ops 4 Cdn Armd Div, C/F Docket I, 8-14 Jan 45; W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Jan 45). Linc & Welld R. in divisional reserve, stayed at Loon-op-Zand. By 11 Jan the entire division was settled, 28 Cdn Armd Regt having concentrated at Udenhout and 22 Cdn Armd Regt, who had just returned from Halsteren, also in divisional reserve, in the area of the

Seminary at Raam (W.D., Linc & Welld R. 28 Cdn Armd Regt, 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 9-11 Jan 45).

144. As 4 Cdn Armd Div settled down to its task of watching the river line, and of organizing patrols, the situation to the west of Waalwijk, and towards Tholen, remained unchanged to any marked degree. The river barrier from Raamsdonk to Willemstad was being held mainly by 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt with several Belgian Fusilier companies under command; though 47 (R.M.) Cdo was still operating in the area and making frequent sorties into enemy territory (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/M: January Sitreps, folio 80, 9 Jan 45). In the area extending from Wilemstad westwards to Philipsland, then south to Halsteren, 62 A.Tk Regt had been joined by a Polish armoured regiment (now stationed at Halsteren) (Ibid, folio 77) and several successful raids were carried out. One of these was notable for the fact that an entire platoon of personnel from 62 A.Tk Regt crossed to Schouwen Island, where, after roaming freely for three hours, they took one prisoner, killed two enemy and returned without suffering any casualties (Ibid, folio 78, 10 Jan 45). Along their own front, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt had a novel experience - they encountered civilians returning from Northern Holland. These courageous men brought back a wealth of information which helped in no small way to build up the picture of the enemy's dispositions. (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 10 Jan 45)

145. Further to the east, where elements of 1 Pol Armd Div had fitted into the defensive line from Waspik to Waalwijk, the enemy was observed on 12 Jan to be reinforcing his outpost on Kapelscheveer. It fell to 47 Cdo to drive the Germans to their own side of the river; for this position, though as yet a small thorn in First Canadian Army's line, might well develop into a prickly growth with disturbing branches. The Commando operation began on 13 Jan. The attack started well, and a few stout troops managed to reach the objective, but as the hours passed, opposition became so stiff and casualties so numerous that they had to be withdrawn. (AEF 45/1 Pol Armd Div/C/H: folio 98, Sitrep, 14 Jan 45; AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H: Sitrep, folio 70, 14 Jan 45). As it was evident that it would require a larger force to succeed, the enemy position was contained with a view to attacking it in greater strength later.

146. In the 4 Cdn Armd Div sector 10 Cdn Inf Bde wasted little time. An intense patrolling programme was immediately planned by Brigadier J.C. Jefferson, D.S.O. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Jan 45). The first in the series was the Alq R. scout's patrol which crossed the river during the night of 11/12 Jan. This patrol, working with great stealth, pinpointed enemy slit-trenches and patrol routes about Hederhemert and acquired valuable information regarding the opposition. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Jan 45). A. & S.H. of C. followed up this success by crossing the water in the early hours of 14 Jan. Unfortunately this force was pinned down and forced to return after suffering two casualties (Ibid, 14 Jan 45; W.D., A. & S.H. of C., 14 Jan 45). Nevertheless, there was no stopping the ambitious troops. At first light on 15 Jan Alq R. crossed again, this time with a larger force of 28 all ranks, and returned after 35 minutes. During that short time, they killed six enemy and captured one prisoner from 16 Para Regt of 6 Para Div (Ibid, 15 Jan 45). While the infantry units were thus employed, 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt had spent a considerable time shooting up the enemy's area across the river. On 11 Jan 22 tanks carried out a splendid shoot. On the night of 13 Jan they followed this

blow by supporting the Polish and Commando attack on Kapelscheveer. Thereafter the tank gunners continued to harass the enemy positions daily (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 13-15 Jan 45).

147. In the meantime, 4 Cdn Armd Bde's area had not been void of excitement. Many of the routine patrols which Lake Sup R. (Mot) and 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt carried out developed into aggressive sorties across the Maas with successful results (W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 12 Jan 45). But the enemy in turn had not been idle. He frequently pounded our forward positions with mortar and raked the riverline with machine-gun fire, and more than once sent his own patrols to the south bank of the Maas (Ibid, 15 Jan 45). Though the nights were busy all along the front, the daylight hours were not without their use. Troops who were not resting followed training programmes and the Divisional Training School at Udenhout was well stocked with prospective N.C.O. material from the various regiments. Recreation was plentiful - dances were held frequently and the Auxiliary Services took full advantage of the many halls available to entertain the men with pictures and concerts (Ibid, 13 Jan 45).

THE RIGHT FLANK: 2 CDN CORPS, 8-14 JAN 45

148. Over on 2 Cdn Corps sector, the picture of the enemy's dispositions was being effectively determined by the fairly constant flow of prisoners and deserters brought in by patrols (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/K/F: Brig N.E. Rodger, C. of S. Diary, 8 Jan 45). In addition, heavy ammunition and supply dumping programmes were being carried out in case Operation "VERITABLE" should suddenly come to life. Nijmegen assumed an especially busy appearance as 49 Div began to clear the miscellaneous units out of the town to make room for the build up (Ibid, 2100 hrs 9 Jan, 0930 hrs 11 Jan 45). The possibility of "VERITABLE" seemed to fade once more on 13 Jan, however, when the Army Commander stated that the operation was still in the indefinite future and that even the date for the preceding attack by 12 Corps to close up to the Roer river was not firmly fixed (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 13 Jan 45).

149. North and west of Nijmegen 49 (W.R.) Inf Div still persisted in its patrols. A feature of particular interest at this time was the entertainment provided by the enemy's propaganda loudspeaker, which broke the cold silence in front of the Lincolns' positions. It was natural for our own good humoured retaliation to take the form of heavy artillery and mortar concentrations, after which no further exhortations to our men to surrender were heard. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 11 Jan 45, Serial 6). A good deal of movement was seen all along the front (Ibid, 12 Jan 45, Serial 3), and the groups who frequently crept into the enemy's lines invariably netted prisoners (Ibid, 11 Jan 45, Serial 6). One of the more exciting incidents in this locality took place on 13 Jan when the midget submarines observed by 3 Cdn Inf Div (see para 151) were reported to be travelling downstream towards the 49 Div sector (Ibid, 13 Jan 45, Serials 13 and 17). These were eventually clearly seen and engaged by direct 40-mm fire as well as by ground artillery, with the result that one at least was destroyed. The under-water explosions which followed for some time, however,

lent truth to the belief that the enemy was attempting to destroy whatever bridges or booms we had over the Waal River (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/K/F: 13 Jan 45).

150. As the days of January went by, the area of 3 Cdn Inf Div saw notable increase in offensive activity. On the 8th N. Shore R. launched a daylight attack against the well-sited enemy positions west of Wyler. The attack was made in heavy snow by a company of infantry supported by wasps and carriers. The troops, dressed in white camouflage smocks, achieved some success as three prisoners were taken, and the enemy position was occupied, but the cost was eight men killed, eight wounded and the loss of two carriers. The enemy, as always extremely sensitive to violent action, counter-attacked the same night but were driven off. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945, Appx 45, Appx 3, Ops Log, 8 Jan 45, Serials 20 and 21). The following day H.L.I. of C. raided Einjeshof Farm, some two miles north-east of Beek, but this attack only succeeded in driving out the enemy temporarily. (Ibid, 9 Jan 45, Serial 21). Normal patrols continued to be despatched with varying success. There were still numbers of civilians arriving from the enemy's side of the river, and these were immediately taken into custody until identity was established. Many of these were, however, authentic refugees and provided much interesting and greatly needed information. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 9 Jan 45, Serials 6 and 7). On the night of 12/13 Jan, R. de Chaud carried out another raid in the vicinity of Wyler. Here the assaulting parties killed several of the enemy and captured two prisoners, but the cost to the raiders was severe, four men being killed, four wounded and one left unaccounted for. (Ibid, 13 Jan 45, Serial 23). Meanwhile a more agreeable note had been struck on the night of 10/11 Jan when 6 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 5 Cdn Inf Bde, to come under command of 3 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid, 11 Jan 45, Serials 2 and 4). 5 Cdn Inf Bde reverted to 2 Cdn Inf Div and thus heralded the return of this division to a direct operational role. 2 Cdn Inf Div itself came into the line on 12 Jan, and the old boundaries which had been changed during the New Year state of emergency were restored. 3 Cdn Inf Div now disposed itself with 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes in the forward areas, and N. Shore R. and 1 C. Scot R., who up to this time had been under direct divisional command, now reverted to their own brigades. (Ibid, 12 Jan 45, Serial 25)

151. The element of the fantastic came to life later that day, when at about 1200 hrs (13 Jan) 9 Cdn Inf Bde reported a peculiar craft moving upstream on the Waal River. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 13 Jan 45, Serial 12). It was clear that this was an under-water effort by the Germans to destroy the Nijmegen bridge. Our fire caused the first craft to beach, whereupon the crew emerged, only to be engaged by small arms fire. A few minutes later a second object blew up in the water. (Ibid, Serials 13 and 14). An hour later two more submarines were reported to be going downstream and two torpedo-like smaller craft were seen, one of which beached itself, while the other became entangled in the naval boom. The latter blew up and caused some damage. Several other explosions followed and eventually a gap was blown in the boom to a width of 150 feet. (Ibid, Serials 23, 24 and 26). During the late afternoon, however, bomb disposal squads and Naval specialists repaired much of the damage to the boom. The bridge itself remained untouched. (AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: Docket I: Weekly Summaries of Cdn Ops and Activities, 6-13 Jan 45).

152. Since 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp's return from Bostel, 2 Cdn Inf Div had been regrouping. On 10 Jan, 6 Cdn Inf Bde exchanged positions with 5 Cdn Inf Bde. The latter formation, having held its line continuously and without relief since 15 Dec 44, reverted to command 2 Cdn Inf Div with its attached sub-units and was rejoined by R.H.C. from its attendant role at Divisional H.Q. A newly formed 6 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, consisting of 6 Cdn Inf Bde (less Fus M.R.), 6 Cdn Fd Regt together with elements of 3 Cdn L.A.A. Regt, 108 A.Tk Bty and 10 Cdn Fd Amb, went to 3 Cdn Inf Div for operations, while Fus M.R. remained under direct control of G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div. (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 12-13 Jan 45, and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, January 1945: Appx 2, Sitreps, 10 Jan 45). There was little news of operational interest. 8 Cdn Recce Regt and Tor Sect R. (M.G.), who held the thin line from Cuijk to Boxmeer, continued their routine patrols. On the morning of 12 Jan, as 2 Cdn Inf Div prepared to take over a portion of the front, the G.O.C. outlined his policy on the resumption of responsibility for the Groesbeek sector (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 12 Jan 45), and by 2030 hours the same night, the brigades were in position. The troops went into the front-line imbued with new enthusiasm, for, as Maj-Gen Matthews had stressed that day, the planning of Operation "VERITABLE" would probably be based upon the information gained by 2 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid). 2 Cdn Armd Bde, now entirely on 2 Cdn Corps' front, remained static in its reserve task. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 11-13 Jan 45)

153. In the meantime 3 Brit Div's area on the right flank was mainly significant for its quietness. Little of importance occurred apart from the daily patrols and the gathering of the occasional prisoner (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 10 Jan 45, Serial 6). The divisional artillery and mortars harassed the opposing positions with some consistency and the enemy was not loathe to retaliate. (Ibid, 13 Jan 45, Serial 4)

THE LARGER PICTURE

154. While First Cdn Army had been carrying out its allotted task, the tide in the Ardennes was gradually turning against the enemy's offensive, although the weather had to some extent slowed down our progress. Nevertheless, Laroche had fallen on 10 Jan, and 6 Airborne Div had entered St Hubert the following day, while by 13 Jan 51 (H.) Inf Div was on the line of the Ourthe south of Laroche and the attack of XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps from the area of Stavelot - Malmedy towards St.Vith was providing a dire threat to the enemy's communications at the base of the existing salient. (Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 224). In the Saar, the enemy's penetration had not increased, but very heavy fighting continued in the region of Hotten (R1733) and Herusheim (R1214). Furthermore there were definite indications that the enemy was making an all-out effort to consolidate his gains towards Strasbourg, and it daily became clearer that the German attacks were being conducted with a view to capturing this old city. (First Cdn Army Int Summaries Nos. 191, 193, 194, 195 and 196, 9-12 Jan 45)

155. On First Cdn Army's front the air of mystery which had surrounded the enemy's intention north of the Maas River since the beginning of the year had not been dispelled: if anything it was more puzzling.

With the mass of civilian information, the constant redispotion of the enemy, and the lack of recent photo cover, the enemy's threats across the Maas and in the islands cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Of the two, present evidence prefers Schouwen. Two divisions have left the Altena and last evidence showed a substantial decrease in guns. On Schouwen however, there has been no reported reduction, nor has there ever been the same definition of intention made by photo interpretations.

Offensive operations from Schouwen, Overflakee and North of the Hollandschdiep must be expected until the contrary is proven.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 196, 12 Jan 45)

156. By 13 Jan, however, two bits of newly acquired information went a long way towards solving the difficult intelligence problem in the north, where since 5 Jan climatic conditions had prevented air-photo reconnaissance, as well as operational flying of any importance (Ibid, Nos. 191 to 197 incl, 7-13 Jan 45). Civilian line crossers added further information, and the situation was now appreciated thus:

Middelharnis E5357 and Sommeldijk R5257 on Overflakee each have a garrison of 2000 troops, the Middelharnis contingent having arrived 22 Dec 44. They were expected to attack through Schouwen either against Walcheren or Brabant but by 9 Jan 45 this attack had been postponed indefinitely. If we discount the numbers this report checks very neatly with other information and the appreciation already made. It does not dispose of the Schouwen threat but places it under some reasonable restraint.

2 Para Div continues in the Arnhem island as two PW of 7 Para Regt taken south-east of E649737 proved today. Thus, at the least, we have regiments of both 2 and 6 on the island. The attempts this afternoon to break the Nijmegen bridge suggest that a new venture is being directed there. For the moment then, 6 Para Div must be assumed to be on the west of the island with 2 Para shifted slightly to the east

(Ibid, No. 197, 13 Jan 45)

This evidence that the threat from the North Sea islands was waning eased the anxiety on the Army's front, though prisoners and other sources showed that some of the concentrations still remained. (Ibid)

157. By 16 Jan, after a stiff and costly battle, the respective thrusts of First and Third U.S. Armies in the Ardennes met, and the hostile salient was reduced to a bulge. General Eisenhower now ordered First U.S. Army to return to General Bradley's command, but left Ninth U.S. Army under direct control of the C.-in-C., 21 Army Group. Field Marshal Montgomery began withdrawing all his British troops so that they might

regroup for the Rhine battles to follow. There was no time to be lost, for as the C.-in-C. stated:

Now was the opportunity to proceed with the utmost despatch to carry out our plans, in order to take full advantage of the enemy's failure.

(Montgomery, Normany to the Baltic, p. 224)

Furthermore, the C.-in-C. continued:

The enemy had been prevented from crossing the Meuse in the nick of time.

The German counter stroke had been mounted with skill, and the attempt to drive a wedge between the British and American forces to strike at our main supply bases of Liege, Brussels and Antwerp had been a bold though desperate bid to upset the progress of our strategy and to turn the situation on the western front to the enemy's advantage. The ability of the Germans to continue the war depended on avoiding concurrent major offensives on both the eastern and western fronts. Their stringent resources demanded a policy of alternation, whereby one front was stabilized while they concentrated against the other.

By the Ardennes offensive the enemy had hoped to hit the Western Allies so hard that our plans would have been seriously retarded, and the German striking force could have been switched to the sore-pressed eastern front.

There was another reason for playing for time. Time was necessary for the development of production in the dispersed industries remaining in operation, and in the underground factories which were being speedily constructed. New weapons were on the way: jet-propelled aircraft and faster submarines. Efforts had also to be made to make good the losses suffered in the winter battles of attrition and to raise the standard of the depleted German infantry.

There may also have been political considerations prompting the Ardennes offensive; Hitler may well have hoped to secure some success to brighten the Christmas of the depressed German nation.

(Ibid, pp 224 and 225)

158. Although the Allied fortunes were definitely on the upward swing in the south, on the First Cdn Army front the Intelligence staff was still in a bewildered state regarding the northern flank. Since the threat in the north was primarily from paratroops, prisoners from this type of formation were searchingly questioned, and the conclusion was reached that 6 Para Div held the Land Van Altena and the Bommelerwaard, 2 Para Div the Island and that 712 Div had been relieved. An alternative theory was that 6 Para Div was positioned from Biesbosch to Wageningen with elements of 712 Div under command. This then was the information passed

on to the front line troops, together with the exhortation to stimulate the defence of the extended line by aggressive patrolling. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 199, 15 Jan 45). During the last two weeks the enemy's patrol activity had fallen somewhat below the peak reached in late December. Up until 13 Jan only nine enemy patrols were observed, - mainly in the vicinity of Geertruidenberg. On the Reichswald front the enemy's actions were more consistent, especially about the town of Wyler Meer. From these activities it could be deduced that the enemy had been mostly interested in the sector between the Altena and Arnhem Island and in our dispositions before the Reichswald Forest. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 198, 14 Jan 45)

159. In respect of offensive action, the elements were not with us. The weather, which had closed down during the second week of January, brightened considerably about 14 Jan and allowed our air forces once again to remind the enemy of his inferiority in this respect. This, however, was not a lasting blessing, and throughout the week which followed the few clear hours of flying literally had to be snatched from the unsympathetic climate. In spite of this handicap some 1250 sorties were flown up to and including 20 Jan. (R.A.F., 84 Gp, Int Summary Nos 159 - 164, 14 - 21 Jan 45)

INTENSIVE PATROLLING AND SMALL-SCALE ACTION, 15-21 JAN 45

160. While the remaining enemy was being dealt with in the Ardennes bulge and the Germans were attempting to reinforce their positions in the Saar, Lt-Gen Crocker, Comd 1 Brit Corps, received a message from General Crerar, in which the G.O.C.-in-C. stated:

There is very strong evidence that the enemy has abandoned his previous intention of launching a strong attack against the front of 1 Brit Corps.

(G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4/1: Letter from G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army to Lt-Gen Crocker, Comd 1 Brit Corps, dated 14 Jan 45)

General Crerar continued by saying that should the enemy revise his intention, 4 Cdn Armd Div (which had been under command 1 Brit Corps since the beginning of the year) would be at the immediate disposal of First Cdn Army. In addition, since Operation "VERITABLE" was again under active planning and would probably call for participation by 4 Cdn Armd Div on some considerable scale, he suggested that 1 Pol Armd Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div should each hold as narrow a front as possible, while the maximum amount of training for the anticipated operations should be done by their troops in reserve. (Ibid) In fulfilment of this aim both divisions augmented their front line activities by intensified training in the rear areas. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 15 Jan 45)

161. In the eastern part of the Corps sector, 1 Pol Armd Regt, now situated at Halsteren, and 62 A.Tk Regt with several companies of Belgian Fusiliers under command, watched the water barrier from St. Philipsland to Geertruidenberg. Civilian line crossers continued to arrive in our forward positions daily. Many of these, apart from conveying the picture of the great hardships being experienced in Northern Holland under the German heel, gave other useful information. (W.D., 18 Cdn

Armd C. Regt, 15 Jan 45). The enemy, as a whole, was inactive in this sector, although some shelling occurred and almost every raid produced some prisoners. Most noteworthy of these was a raid by No. 4 Cdo on Schouwen Island, which accounted for 16 of the enemy, eight being left dead along the dykes. (Ibid, and AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H: Sitrep, 18 Jan 45, folio 98). A further note of interest is found in the fact that during 19 Jan the water level along the river rose to such a height that many of the forward positions had to be evacuated (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 19 Jan 45) - a welcome move for many soldiers, for the heavy snowfalls had made the watery trenches the most disagreeable of domiciles. (Ibid, 20 Jan 45)

162. While to the east of Geertruidenberg elements of 1 Pol Armd Div and 47(R.M.) Cdo kept Kapelscheveer under close scrutiny, greater excitement was to be found on 4 Cdn Armd Div's front, where Maj-Gen Vokes' men were winning new laurels in their frequent dashes across the river. On the successive nights of 14 and 15 Jan, groups of Lake Sup R. (Mot) embarked from the areas of Gewande, Bokhoven and Empel and slid over the water. Each of these patrols either captured a prisoner or inflicted fatal casualties on the enemy. (W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 14 and 15 Jan 45). This effort by no means surpassed that of Alq R. of 10 Cdn Inf Bde, who, following up its successes of 14 Jan, crossed in some strength on 18 Jan to bring back two unfortunate prisoners. (W.D., Alq R., 18 Jan 45). The armoured regiments and the divisional artillery spent the daylight hours and a good part of each night showering shells of all calibres upon every visible object on the enemy's side. (AED 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket I: Weekly Summary of Ops, 15-20 Jan 45)

163. While the attention of the enemy was being thus engaged, the G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div was busily drawing up plans for a more ambitious undertaking, for on 14 Jan Maj-Gen Vokes had received instructions from G.O.C. 1 Brit Corps to destroy the enemy bridgehead on Kapelscheveer. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 14 Jan 45). On 17 Jan this order was passed for execution to Brigadier J.C. Jefferson, D.S.O., Comd 10 Cdn Inf Bde, who outlined his plan to his subordinates that same day. It was to be a full battalion attack by Linc & Welld R., supported by the entire resources of 1 Brit Corps, and was to be carried out between 26 and 31 Jan. Once entrusted with the details of this operation, Major J.F. Swazye, acting C.O. Linc & Welld R., immediately set about training his force for the assault, which was given the code name, Operation "ELEPHANT". (W.D., 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Jan 45). While the new plans were being considered, Lake Sup R. (Mot) again claimed headline attention by launching a full company-raid across the water in broad daylight to the east of Empel. The entire operation, which went in at 1230 hours on 17 Jan, was carried out with clockwork precision against light opposition, with the result that not only was the required number of two prisoners slightly exceeded for a loss of only four wounded, but the information obtained was of such high value that the divisions was heartily congratulated by the Corps Commander. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 17 Jan 45)

164. While 4 Cdn Armd Div continued to harass the enemy positions north of the Maas, the general situation in the area of 2 Cdn Corps remained comparatively unchanged. In the Nijmegen salient, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had experienced several brisk encounters with the opposition, one of which took place on the night of 15 Jan at a cost of one officer

and nine other ranks lost. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 16 Jan 45, Serial 3). Identifications, however, were procured regularly to disclose the presence of 7 and 18 Para Regts (Ibid, 17 Jan 45, Serial 13). That these troops were not lacking in initiative was proved once more at first light on 18 Jan, when three determined attacks were flung against the Leicestershire positions near Zetten. The first two of these were thrown back, but the third, estimated at company strength, completely overran the British forward platoon. Speedy support arrived from 6 Cdn Armd Regt, and by 1630 hours the situation was restored somewhat, and 25 enemy prisoners were counted. At 0600 hours next morning the enemy launched a fresh attack, and soon fierce street fighting was taking place in Zetten itself. By 1730 hrs, however, most of the enemy who had infiltrated into the British locality had been pushed out and the sector again became quiet, while the clearing of the town continued. (Ibid, 17 Jan 45, Serials 9 and 12). Another 11 prisoners had been collected against our own heavy losses of 51 killed, wounded or missing. (Ibid, 20 Jan 45, Serial 4). Small attacks occurred across the divisional front almost daily. (Ibid, Serials 8, 14, 15 and 16). But by the night of 20 Jan Zetten was clear and the village of Hemmen, from which many enemy patrols had been operating, was being searched, in order that a demolition programme might be carried out which would deny the enemy observation posts in that area. (Ibid, 21 Jan 45, Serial 9)

165. Further to the south in the Groesbeek sector, 2 Cdn Inf Div remained firmly emplaced in its defensive area. 4 Cdn Inf Bde held the northern half of the divisional sector, 6 Cdn Inf Bde the left with 5 Cdn Inf Bde in reserve. 8 Cdn Recce Regt still remained between Cuijk and Boxmeer. Apart from 14 Jan, when our troops experienced a leaflet raid from low flying enemy aircraft, little of interest occurred, although there had been indications on 17 Jan that there was an enemy concentration in the woods between Gennep and Heijen. This and all other movement was as a matter of course discouraged by heavy artillery fire as soon as it was observed. (Weekly Summaries of Cdn Ops and Activities, 2 Cdn Inf Div, 14-20 Jan 45). On 20 Jan, the G.A.F. again flew over the divisional sector, and enemy troops were seen forming up near Katersbosch and Middelaar opposite Fus M.R. They were immediately dispersed by our guns. In contrast with the dull existence in the front line, the rear areas were busy hives of activity. Training of every description was being carried out by all units in preparation for the Spring offensives. (Ibid)

166. Following the tense moments created by the enemy's midget submarine attack on Nijmegen Bridge on 13 Jan, 3 Cdn Inf Div, which had relinquished its responsibilities in the Groesbeek sector to 2 Cdn Inf Div on 12 Jan, continued to send out contact reconnaissance and fighting patrols against 84 Div, which occupied the front along the Reichswald Forest. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: Weekly Summaries of Cdn Ops and Activities, 14-20 Jan 45). On 15 Jan, 7 Cdn Inf Bde, having handed over its commitments to elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div, relieved 9 Cdn Inf Bde in the left sector (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 15 Jan 45, Serial 1), but two days later 9 Cdn Inf Bde once again took up a forward position, this time from 8 Cdn Inf Bde, in the southern half of the divisional front. (Ibid, 18 Jan 45, Serial 2). The reliefs made possible by this speedy system of rotation were warmly welcomed by the troops who had all been in the line since 25 Dec 44.

167. In the extreme south, 3 Brit Div had temporarily led a quiet existence until 1200 hours 19 Jan, when it reverted to command Second British Army. As a result the existing boundary between 8 Cdn Recce Regt and 3 Brit Div now became the new Army boundary. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q., First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 58, Ops Log, Sitrep No. 358, 19 Jan 45)

APPRECIATIONS AND PLANS

168. The Ardennes situation was by now greatly improved. Since 14 Jan the American forces in the south had made excellent progress. On 15 Jan Third U.S. Army had attacked the enemy's bridgehead near Saalern, while First U.S. Army closed in on Houffalize. Meanwhile, 30 Brit Corps (under command Third U.S. Army), whose troops had undergone much stiff fighting, were regrouping and preparing to disengage. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: Press Conference No. 236, 15 Jan 45). On 16 Jan, while VI U.S. Corps assaulted Hatten, and patrols of VII U.S. Corps prodded into Houffalize, to find it evacuated (Ibid, No. 237, 16 Jan 45), troops of XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps were still fighting bitterly around Malmedy and Stavelot. (Ibid). That same morning 12 Brit Corps went over to the offensive towards Susteren and by 0900 hours 18 Jan Susteren was clear. In the meantime, the American armies had continued their respective drives and had captured Vielsalm, Bourcy and Longuilly, six miles south-east of Bastogne. (Ibid, No. 239, 18 Jan 45). By the morning of 20 Jan, as 12 Brit Corps' attack steadily gained ground and the American forces continued their advance, a further flame was kindled in the Colmar sector where First French Army lunged forward to the offensive (Ibid, No. 242, 21 Jan 45).

169. At first the enemy, according to the C.-in-C., "had succeeded in wresting the initiative from us, and in forcing us to postpone our own offensive intentions. The Allies had been caught off balance by the enemy, and had suffered a tactical reverse." (Montgomery, op cit, p. 226). However, by 20 Jan, it was clear that, although he still held St. Vith and was fighting with unabated fury, especially in the area of Strasbourg, where he had managed to reinforce his formations, he was withdrawing from the Ardennes front. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 204, 20 Jan 45, para 1). The Germans were evidently hard pressed, not only in the west. In the east, on 12 Jan, the long awaited Russian winter offensive had begun. It was not long before General Crerar received a report that the Russians had identified 711 Inf Div, which had only recently been seen on the Maas line, on the Russian front in Hungary. This was the first time that the enemy had accomplished such a quick transfer from one front to the other, and it gave sign that all was not well. (General Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45, para 6)

170. At a C.-in-C.'s conference which took place on 16 Jan, the Field-Marshal had appreciated that von Runstedt might strike again from his base along the Siegfried Line very shortly, and had stated the immediate necessity for recovering the initiative. Field-Marshal Montgomery said that his proposal for dealing a decisive blow in the near future had already been accepted by the Supreme Commander, and that the plan as generally agreed upon in early December would remain. (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45, p. 2, para 8; and W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 2, para 4).

The C.-in-C. also confirmed the arrangements by which the bulk of the formations allotted to First Cdn Army for Operation "VERITABLE" would be placed at General Crerar's disposal from 18 Jan (Gen Crerar's Despatch, as above). Gds Armd Div came under command First Cdn Army at 1200 hours, while H.Q. 30 Corps, 51 (H.) Inf Div and 34 Tk Bde followed at 1800 hours the same day. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, January 1945: Appx 58, Sitrep, 19 Jan 45)

171. On 21 Jan, Field-Marshal Montgomery issued a further directive in which he said:

The enemy has suffered a tactical defeat in the ARDENNES, with severe losses in men and material.

12 Army Gp is continuing offensive operations in the ARDENNES in order to take advantage of the enemy's present unfavourable situation, to inflict further losses on him, and to seize any opportunity to breach the SIEGFRIED LINE. These operations are going to be continued so long as they continue to pay a good dividend; thereafter it is the intention to pass to the defensive in the ARDENNES, to re-group, and to attack further to the north on the right flank of 21 Army Group.

The enemy is at present fighting a defensive campaign on all fronts; his situation is such that he cannot stage major offensive operations. Furthermore, at all costs he has to prevent the war from entering on a mobile phase: he has not the transport or the petrol that would be necessary for mobile operations, nor could his tanks compete with ours in the mobile battle.

The enemy is in a bad way; he has had a tremendous battering and has lost heavily in men and equipment. On no account can we relax, or have a "stand still" in the winter months; it is vital that we keep going, so as to wear down his strength still further. There will be difficulties caused by mud, cold, lack of air support during periods of bad weather, and so on. But we must continue to fight the enemy hard during the winter months.

The main objective of the Allies on the western front is the Ruhr; if we can cut it off from the rest of Germany the enemy capacity to continue the struggle will peter out. A further, and very important, object of our operations must be to force mobile war on the Germans. We will therefore continue throughout the winter to conduct such operations as will:

- (a) gain intermediate objectives towards the RUHR.
- (b) place us in a good jumping-off position for a mobile campaign in the Spring.
- (c) wear down the enemy's strength at a greater rate than our own.

The first stage in carrying out this policy must be to close up to the line of the RHINE.

The immediate objective is the line of the RHINE north of DUSSELDORF. Thereafter our hold on the west bank of the river will be extended southwards to BONN, and beyond. When the opportune moment arrives the Allied armies will cross the RHINE in strength north of the RUHR and at such other places as may be ordered by the Supreme Allied Commander.

(G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
file 1-O, Vol II: Directive
M 548, from C.-in-C., 21 Army
Gp, 21 Jan 45)

172. Field-Marshal Montgomery's intention was to destroy all enemy west of the Rhine as a preliminary to crossing the river. The outline plan called for an attack by First Cdn Army to the south-east, with its left flank on the Rhine River. This attack would in time converge with the drive north-eastwards by Ninth U.S. Army, while Second British Army held the centre, but remained ready to cross the Meuse. The C.-in-C. stated his objectives:

The future layout that we want to achieve is to face up to the RHINE from DUSSELDORF northwards on a front of three armies:

Ninth Army: DUSSELDORF to excl MORS.

Second Army: MORS to incl REES.

Canadian Army: excl REES to NIJMEGEN.

(Ibid)

He then went on to outline the task for First Cdn Army:

A strong offensive will be launched south-eastwards between the rivers RHINE and MEUSE and carried as far south as the general line XANTEN - GELDERN. As the advance progresses the whole area will be cleared of the enemy and a firm flank will be formed on the RHINE. Reconnaissances will be carried out to determine the most suitable crossing places.

The operation will be given the name "VERITABLE".

Target date for the operation to be launched:
8 Feb.

(Ibid)

173. The C.-in-C. appreciated that dry weather conditions would be the most suitable, and directed that in this case the basis of the operation would be one of speed and violence, the armoured columns passing through quickly in order to disorganize the enemy in the rear and to achieve the object as rapidly as possible. On the other hand, should the terrain be soft and wet, an alternative plan must be formed. For this operation General Crerar was directed to keep 30 Brit Corps on the right and 2 Cdn Corps on the left. Furthermore, the C.-in-C. added, First Cdn Army will:

(a) hold a secure bridgehead over the RHINE at NIJMEGEN. There must be no possibility of

the enemy damaging the bridges by land or river action, or of interfering with our affairs by offensive action directed towards the "back door" of our offensive.

- (b) hold defensively the general line of the WAAL and MAAS westwards from NIJMEGEN, as at present.
- (c) be responsible for the security of the islands of NORTH BEVELAND, SOUTH BEVELAND and WALCHEREN.

In the general dispositions of the Army, a minimum of one armoured division will be held in mobile reserve, in the TURNHOUT area, and this division will not be employed without reference to me.

(Ibid)

174. The planning staffs at once began to work at high pressure, for time was short. On 23 Jan Field-Marshal Montgomery held a further conference. He told the assembled commanders of First Cdn, Second Brit and Ninth U.S. Armies that Lt-Gen Simpson's projected thrust from the south-east could not be initiated until his Army was up to the agreed strength of 12 divisions, but that if First U.S. Army's attack on the axis of Euskinchen - Bonn went very well, First Cdn Army might launch Operation "VERITABLE" independently. The C.-in-C. stated, however, that unless the general situation to the south looked promising, "VERITABLE" would not go in without the aid of Ninth U.S. Army. Thus if the effort by First U.S. Army did not rise to expectations and Ninth U.S. Army's attack was therefore not possible, the offensive as a whole might be postponed. (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45, para 12). On this understanding General Crerar set to work to complete his plans.

175. On 25 Jan, the G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, issued his directive to the Commanders of 1 Brit, 2 Cdn and 30 Brit Corps, and summed up the existing situation as follows:

The enemy has suffered a tactical defeat in the ARDENNES, with severe losses in men and material. First U.S. Army is continuing offensive operations in that sector, in order to take advantage of the enemy's present unfavourable situation and to seize any opportunity to breach the Siegfried Line.

On the front of 6 U.S. Army Group, however, the enemy continues to re-act offensively. It cannot be said, therefore, that the initiative has passed definitely to the Allied Armies on the Western front. In consequence, it is vital that, in spite of all the difficulties of weather and terrain, we continue to fight the enemy hard, wear down his strength at a greater rate than our own, and then, by securing a really important military objective, wrest the initiative completely away from his possession.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, Jan 45: Appx "A"3, Operational Directive, 25 Jan 45)

General Crerar then outlined the Army's objectives:

It is the intention of C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, so to proceed that this situation is brought about, and as the means to that end - Operation "VERITABLE" - a strong offensive launched south-eastwards between Rivers MAAS and RHINE - will be carried out by First Cdn Army.

The First Cdn Army, with target date 8 Feb, will attack south-eastwards from its present sector east and south of NIJMEGEN, between the Rivers MAAS and RHINE, with the intention of destroying all enemy between those rivers and as far south as the general line GELDERN - XANTEN.

It is necessary to assume that the enemy will strongly man and fight his several lines of organized defences in the operational area given above. On the basis of this assumption the operation as a whole, will comprise several phases and, after each phase is completed, it will be necessary to move up the artillery and supporting weapons and commence the next phase with co-ordinated and heavy fire support, and with controlled movement.

Operation "VERITABLE" will, therefore, be basically planned on the following phases, and objectives.

- Phase 1 The clearing of the REICHSWALD and the securing of the line GENNEP - ASPERDEN - CLEVE.
- Phase 2 The breaching of the enemy's second defensive system east and south-east of the REICHSWALD, the capture of the localities WEEZE - UDEM - CALCAR - EMMERICH and the securing of the communications between them.
- Phase 3 The "break-through" of the HOCHWALD "lay-back" defence lines and the advance to secure the general line GELDERN - XANTEN.

(Ibid)

176. In the meantime, as discussion of these great plans progressed, the front had been buried under a cold blanket of snow, and in spite of the fact that the enemy was showing some definite signs of withdrawing, several stiff battles still raged. (W.D., G.S. Int, H.Q. First Cdn Army, January 1945: Int Summary No. 205, 21 Jan 45). Daily intelligence reports told a story of increasing activity.

In the ARDENNES, roads leading up to the front, which until recently have been comparatively empty, became alive today. From the air columns of "1000 plus MT" were seen, conjuring up memories of the FALAISE gap and the destruction wrecked upon the retreating enemy in those days.

From the mouth of the fast disappearing ARDENNES salient enemy columns of great size were seen moving back through ST VITH P8888 and PRUM 0879 and then bearing in a northerly and north easterly direction through EUSKIRCHEN. The air forces had one of the best day's huntin' since the campaign in the WEST began but their best efforts were unable to halt the enemy in his rearward progress. There is no doubt, however, that the total of "flamers" was a record.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 206, 22 Jan 45)

The enemy's intention was appreciated thus:

Once again the German is on the move. The significance of today's activity in the ARDENNES is twofold. Firstly, that the SIEGFRIED line is likely once again to be pressed into service as a convenient refuge where he can pause in order to recover his breath and collect his wits before the next stage. Secondly, that if this movement implies that one of his panzer armies is to be relieved of its responsibilities, a potential reserve is created, provided that what is left behind is capable of manning the permanent defences and preventing any penetration of the SIEGFRIED Line. With the old familiar divisions still turning up with monotonous regularity, any attempt at this stage to distinguish which formations are in the process of leaving the scene of their short-lived triumph, would be unprofitable. Whatever formations are withdrawn, they are but a shadow of their former selves when they set out so proudly for their ANTWERP dash before Christmas.

(Ibid)

THE ATTACK ON KAPELSCHEVEER

177. Since 21 Jan, as patrols persisted in their sorties beyond the water barrier, the front line in 1 Brit Corps sector had flared up in many places. Particularly was this the case on 22 Jan, when the enemy had retaliated by sending over a strong force of about 50 men into the area of St. Philipsland. Here the Germans overran an observation post manned by elements of 62 A.Tk Regt and demolished a water tower. For a while a stiff fight raged, but reinforcements from 248 A.Tk Bty and 1 Pol Armd Regt were rushed forward, and they finally restored this situation. (AEF 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H: Sitrep fol 86, 23 Jan 45). Further to the east, the uneventful days in the line occupied by 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt and the Belgian Fusilier battalion were in marked contrast to the busy atmosphere around the area of 4 Cdn Armd Div, whose patrols continued to weave their way nightly into the enemy's holdings. To the rear careful preparations had been carried out for Operation "ELEPHANT", and by 23 Jan constant rehearsals had gone a long way towards perfecting the bold plan (See para 163). As the enemy's strength on Kapelscheveer was estimated to be at least 150, and liable to grow if not immediately destroyed, every aspect of the operation was most carefully studied with determination to liquidate the bridgehead at all costs.

178. Kapelscheveer is a strip of land formed at its western end by the splitting of the Maas River and to the east by the junction of several separate water-courses, the southerly Oude Maas and the wider Bergsche Maas. The island is about five miles long and one mile wide. It is quite flat, completely devoid of vegetation, with endless dykes around its perimeter and with numberless small ditches criss-crossing the soggy fields. At the western end, which narrows to a bare 1000 yards, a wagon track ran in a northerly direction to meet a small, rectangular harbour-like inlet, at the base of which stood a strongly-built brick house. It was around this inlet and building that the enemy had centred his defences, which generally followed the water-bound dykes.*
(A Short History, 10 Cdn Inf Bde)

179. The plan for the operation called for the Linc & Welld R. to assault from three directions simultaneously under a very heavy smoke programme. "B" Coy riding in Buffaloes provided by 79 Brit Armd Div would attack from the west, another force of picked men travelling in special canoes was to take the enemy in the rear, while the main effort of the operation by "A" Coy, closely followed by "C" Coy, would come in from the right flank. "D" Coy was to wait in reserve at Capelle. There was to be no preliminary bombardment, though a tremendous quantity of fire power was available for counter-battery action. The concentration of guns included 4 Cdn Armd Div artillery, 1 Pol Armd Div artillery, and 4 A.G.R.A. (consisting of four medium regiments, one heavy 7.2" battery and one heavy 155-mm battery); the mortars would come from the Polish mortar platoon and 10 Cdn Indep (M.G.) Coy, whose heavy machine guns were to be added to those of Tor Scot R. (M.G.). The tanks of 28 Cdn Armd Regt also had a part to play. Their task was to harass all known enemy positions after H Hour, while elements of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt were to give their whole-hearted attention to the north bank of the river. The smoke programme by the guns called for completely blinding any possibility of observation by the enemy from north of the Maas, and this was to be supplemented by the 3" mortar platoon of Alq R. and A. & S.H. of C. Furthermore, A. & S.H. of C. would have a small force available on short notice for a diversionary raid north of Waalwijk. (W.D., Linc & Welld R., January 1945: Appx 11, Outline Plan Operation "ELEPHANT", 19 Jan 45)

180. At 0715 hours on 26 Jan the various headquarters, tense with excitement, received word that all companies and the canoe party were on the move. In quick order, "A" and "B" Coys reported at 0830 hours that they were on their objectives. "B" Coy having crossed in its Buffaloes on the left, had passed the Dyke Junction (080503) on its way forward and "A" Coy slightly south and west of the brick house which was its objective. The canoe party, however, had suffered a severe reverse, for as they paddled westwards along the swift-flowing river, the smoke which was calculated to blind the enemy on the north bank of the Maas River, suddenly lifted. The well-laden but small craft provided a choice target for the enemy's machine gunners and the entire force which was supposed to assault the harbour of Kapelscheveer in the rear was forced to land well short of its goal. Moreover, the troops encumbered by their snowsuits, were by this time wet through, their weapons frozen and many totally unserviceable. Henceforth the effective fighting value of this group vanished. By 0930 hours, all companies were being heavily mortared. "C" Coy, which was to pass through "A" on the right, had got as far as the north-to-south dyke some 500 yards behind the

* See Appx "D".

leading troops, and it suffered heavy punishment from well-directed mortar and small arms fire. By 1000 hours the situation had become much worse: all officers in "A" and "C" Coys were casualties; "A" Coy had been driven back to "C" Coy's position, while "B" Coy on the left was also hard pressed and out of touch with the other two sub-units to the east. At approximately 1100 hours, one platoon of "D" Coy was sent forward on the left to support and reinforce "B" Coy, but all to no avail. The enemy counter-attacked furiously and "B" Coy was forced to withdraw to the dyke junction (080503).

181. In the meantime what remained of "A" and "C" Coys were withdrawn from the island for reorganization. On the left "D" Coy was now fully committed and took up position behind "B" Coy. On the right the regimental anti-tank platoon went forward to occupy the positions previously held by "A" and "C" Coys until relief should be possible. At 1330 hours a further counter-attack was launched against "B" Coy who, despite the hail of enemy fire which rained upon them, held fire. An hour later the German infantry tried new methods. Five boatloads landed near the "B" Coy posts, but were driven off with the aid of artillery fire. Late that afternoon, our plan was changed. "D" Coy was now to pass through "B" Coy and push on behind a heavy concentration of gunfire to the final objective. "A" and "C" Coys, whose resources were now pooled, would fill the vacant space left by the assaulting force while "A" Coy A. & S.H. of C. with two tanks of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt would relieve the anti-tank platoon on the right, thus plugging the east end of the front. During the rest of the day the Canadians held off strong counter-attacks by the enemy, who had reinforced his garrison by boat and was now in a position to force the issue. All night long the guns pounded, but even though our counter-battery programme was based on the best information available, the enemy managed to keep up a devastating fire on the island, causing many casualties. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Jan 45)

182. By first light 27 Jan, several changes had taken place in the situation. On the left the Linc & Welld R. anti-tank platoon relieved "B" Coy, who had been forward since the start of the operation. "D" Coy had gained some 1000 yards to reach 088505 on the western approaches and were now firmly dug in. The A. & S.H. of C. offence on the eastern flank was making slow though definite progress, ably supported by two tanks of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt. An annoying note at this time was the breakdown of the already shaky Class 40 ferry which had been completed over the Oude Maas the night before. The weight of a tank upon it had rendered the ferry useless. By noon 27 Jan, two further attempts by the enemy to reinforce its garrison by boat had been stopped. In both cases heavy artillery concentrations had dispersed the boats and blown some of them clean out of the water. Nevertheless the enemy persisted in his efforts to dislodge the men along the dykes, and a good deal of close fighting took place amid unbelievably heavy mortar fire. At about 1430 hours a flight of Spitfires arrived to bomb and strafe the objective, and the enemy quietened down for a short while, although his defensive fire did not stop. As night fell the tired troops took whatever cover was available, while the engineers worked feverishly to complete the new bridge on the western flank. Their task was finished during the hours of darkness, and three tanks of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt moved over to the island to support "D" Coy in their attack, which began at 0830 hours 28 Jan.

183. Meanwhile on the right, A. & S.H. of C. had committed a second company. "D" Coy relieved "A" Coy and was soon working its way forward with the aid of one tank. The advance was difficult, but by 1500 hours "D" Coy A. & S.H. of C. reported that with the help of Wasp carriers they had reached the house (098496) which was the objective in that area. "D" Coy Linc & Welld R. had also made progress. The troops got as far as the bunker 092500, but here the officer commanding became a casualty as mortars hammered the position. Another officer took over and one platoon from "A" Coy was flung into the fight with the order to press on, but the effort failed as this officer too was killed in the almost non-stop mortar barrage. Elements of the Polish Division now took up positions on the open left flank to act as a seal. Throughout the long, cold hours of the night the troops, in many cases suffering from frostbite and exposure, stubbornly held their ground. The frozen ground made it almost impossible to dig in, and the only cover against the unceasing mortar fire were the watery shell holes which became a most welcome haven.

184. By nightfall, although "D" Coy A. & S.H. of C. was still on the objective it had not as yet succeeded in prying loose the enemy from his underground defences, and at 2200 hours these same Germans turned to the attack, and drove back both the Linc & Welld R. and the A. & S.H. of C. companies. Shortly before midnight "D" Coy A. & S.H. of C. was relieved by "B" Coy, who immediately prepared for a new attack on the following day. Thus ended a day of bloody fighting and heavy losses to both sides. The artillery, again proving its worth, had been seldom silent for more than ten minutes at a time. The next morning "B" Coy A. & S.H. of C. threw themselves forward with renewed vigour, but the approaches to the two demolished houses on the objective were a perfect target for the enemy since there was no cover of any description. By 1600 hours, as troops of Linc & Welld R. held their ground to the west, the A. & S.H. of C. once again reached the objective. But once again the enemy refused to be routed out, holding on with diabolical determination to the basements of the shattered buildings and the slit trenches around them. Eventually the pressure on the weary and half-frozen troops became so severe that the positions in and around the houses had to be abandoned. In the meantime the enemy activity on the left had not been so violent but had been confined to attempts to reinforce his beleaguered garrison. These efforts were sternly dealt with by accurate artillery fire. Late in the afternoon 41 (R.M.) Cdo was brought forward to relieve "C" Coy.

185. During the night 29/30 Jan, the enemy made two more waterborne attempts to reinforce the bridgehead. These were successfully smashed by artillery and mortar fire, and at first light "C" Coy A. & S.H. of C., supported by the few tanks available, again went forward to the attack. All through the day the battle raged back and forth and the Canadian losses steadily mounted, but by evening, although "A" Coy's forward platoon was still pinned down, its supporting tank having been knocked out, "C" Coy had finally captured the main enemy stronghold. Towards midnight the remaining platoons of "A" Coy relieved "C" Coy and the scout platoon moved up as a welcome reinforcement. "C" Coy A. & S.H. of C. had been forward for some two days; they had suffered substantial casualties and the majority of the men, cold, wet and hungry, had not slept in more than 70 hours. During the night 30/31 Jan scouts of the A. & S.H. of C. contacted

the forward platoon of "D" Coy Linc & Welld R., whose troops, though not actively engaged in the assault, for the past few days had been under a constant and utterly murderous mortar bombardment. Early on the morning of 31 Jan elements of Linc & Welld R. advanced eastwards from their wet slit trenches to close the gap, and at 0900 hours the two battalions linked up and the entire area was thoroughly cleared and checked. The battle of Kapelscheveer was finally over. It ended against a background curiously twisted by the natural elements, for as the troops cleared away the debris of battle and collected the dead, the intense cold seemed to disappear and the sun broke through the clouds, first turning the atmosphere suprisingly warm, and then, as the rays melted the snow, dissolving the ground, already thoroughly churned by the artillery, into a vast sea of mud. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 26-31 Jan 45; A. & S.H. of C., 26-31 Jan 45; Linc & Welld R., 26-31 Jan 45 and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 26-31 Jan 45)

186. For sheer misery and for the extremely heavy price paid, this minor operation ranks with any in the campaign. The cold was paralyzing, and many a soldier was carried out of the action with frozen hands or feet. The enemy resistance was the old fierce tenacity of 6 Para Div, coupled with such fanaticism as can only be found in men drenched in the Nazi cult. On more than one occasion participants in the action reported that they had seen Germans, scorched and burning from our flame throwers, beat out the flames upon them and continue to fight until they were killed. The enemy was completely wiped out; 145 dead were counted, 64 wounded and 34 taken prisoners, but the losses sustained by the troops of 4 Cdn Armd Div were extremely heavy. Ten officers were killed, 13 officers were wounded, 44 O.Rs. were killed, 255 were wounded. The tanks were the decisive factor on this flat, sodden island, where their use had been undreamt of. They, and the engineers who got them across, performed miracles, although eight Shermans and two Stewart tanks were left behind, half sunken testimonials of the strangest, probably the most tragic, and certainly the costliest operation of its size in the war. (W.D., Linc & Welld R. 27-31 Jan 45, and A Short History of 10 Cdn Inf Bde)

ACTIVITIES OF 2 CDN CORPS 22 JAN - 4 FEB 45

187. While 4 Cdn Armd Div's attention had been occupied with the preparation for "ELEPHANT" and the subsequent terrific fight at Kapelscheveer, to the east, on the left of 2 Cdn Corps' sector, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had collected 341 prisoners during strenuous mopping up operations in the Zetten area (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 206, 22 Jan 45, para 2). This figure, added to an estimated 250 killed and wounded, represented a decisive local victory for the British troops, whose overall casualties were given as 15 killed, 77 wounded and five missing. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, January 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 22 Jan 45, Serials 10, 13 and 19)

188. South of Nijmegen 2 Cdn Inf Div still maintained a defensive line as far as Boxmeer. 3 Cdn Inf Div, as of 20 Jan, had 9 Cdn Inf Bde up on the right, 7 Cdn Inf Bde on the left, while 8 Cdn Inf Bde remained in reserve. Raids had provided the interest in this sector. The first of these was Operation "PETE", carried out on the night of 20/21 Jan by 1 C. Scot R., but with little result, since the enemy had withdrawn. More successful was the second, Operation "PAUL", which was staged by "C" Coy, Nth N.S. Highrs on 23 Jan against

enemy positions near Wyler, and which netted eight prisoners (W.Ds., 1 C. Scot R., 21 Jan 45: and Nth N.S. Highrs, 23 Jan 45). These minor actions were welcome breaks in the monotony of otherwise completely restrained action. In the meantime, 2 Cdn Inf Div also had a quiet time with few breaks in the general serenity. On 21 Jan the divisional artillery was active in showering the enemy defences with propaganda leaflets, and on 24 Jan a small enemy bridgehead near Boxmeer, which had been discovered two days previously, was attacked by elements of 27 Cdn Armd Regt and 8 Cdn Recce Regt. Despite the fact that the enemy reacted strongly with 88-mm and mortar fire, his opposition was overcome and four prisoners were taken. The attacking troops suffered no casualties. (2 Cdn Inf Div Weekly Summaries of Ops and Activities, 21-27 Jan 45). The following day a minor regrouping began, with 5 Cdn Inf Bde moving up to take over from 9 Cdn Inf Bde. This left 3 Cdn Inf Div with only one forward sector, that held by 7 Cdn Inf Bde, who however, were relieved by 9 Cdn Inf Bde on the night of 29/30 Jan. 7 and 8 Cdn Inf Bdes now were in concentration areas to the rear. At the same time 3 Cdn Inf Div proceeded to withdraw and change some of its dispositions south of Nijmegen in order to provide extra accommodation for other formations who had arrived to aid in the build-up for Operation "VERITABLE". (Ibid, 3 Cdn Inf Div, 21-27 Jan 45)²²

"VERITABLE" ON THE WAY

189. The end of January found the planning staffs of First Cdn Army very busy. "VERITABLE" was definitely on the way, and preparations for the assault were proceeding in a satisfactory manner. The huge ammunition dumping programme was almost completed, while the engineer units worked day and night, marking the routes and areas - a programme of activity which in time would facilitate the movement and control of troops who were to take part in the gigantic attack. (W.D, G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 25 Jan 45)

190. All doubt regarding the operation was dispelled at 1700 hours, 1 Feb, when the C.-in-C. told General Crerar that "VERITABLE" would go in regardless of the situation elsewhere. Now that this decision had been firmly made, a cover plan for the coming offensive was produced. The immediate responsibility for this became the task of 1 Brit Corps (see paras 89-91). It was meant to convey to the enemy that

...for reasons of the highest political urgency, the Supreme Commander had been directed to undertake offensive operations against Northern Holland... Lt-General Crocker's activities would indicate an active intention to seize the "island" on either side of the Hedel - Zaltbommel road, and to colour the illusion that the considerable concentrations taking place in the Army area were being made for the purpose of an attack across the rivers to the north, firm restrictions were placed on all movement north-east of a line between Helmond and 's Hertogenbosch.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45)

* A map showing dispositions of First Cdn Army on 1 Feb 45 appears at Appx "E".

The fact that 30 Corps, now relieved from the Ardennes, was at the disposal of First Cdn Army and concentrating in the Army area would add to and further strengthen this deception.

191. In the Nijmegen area, a vast programme of concealment and camouflage was undertaken to hide the concentration of weapons, vehicles and ammunition dumps, for as the G.O.C.-in-C. stated,

...I placed particular emphasis on the fact that no effort or thought was wasted which gained for us the slightest appreciable measure of surprise. It was on this principle that the technique of the fire preparation for the assault was worked out in order to secure the closest possible integration of movement with overwhelming fire both from artillery and the air.

(Ibid)

192. At his next conference on 4 Feb, the C.-in-C. informed General Crerar and the other assembled commanders

...that the Supreme Commander had now decided that the joint offensives by the First Canadian and Ninth U.S. Armies were to be carried out as tasks of first priority. The only exception would be the operations about to be undertaken by the First U.S. Army to capture the dams controlling the River Roer. As a result of the difficulties experienced by SHAEF, however, the forces under Lt-General Simpson's command would not be so strong as had been hoped. Ten divisions only had been allotted, all for the Ninth U.S. Army. Consequently, no American divisions would be available to the Second British Army and Lt-General Dempsey's projected crossing of the Meuse at Venlo would either not take place, or would be carried out in a somewhat tentative way. Nor, in view of this changed situation, would the 7th British Armoured Division, as previously arranged, be held in reserve for First Cdn Army. On the other hand, with the 12th British Corps in Army Group Reserve, Lt-General Simpson would not now need to keep any reserve in hand himself, and could utilize all his formations for the offensive, which, barring the unforeseen, would go in as a pre-dawn attack on 10 Feb. Lt-General Simpson added that if the First U.S. Army had not captured the Roer dams by that date, his own attack would nevertheless go in, since it was not anticipated that any flooding which the enemy might cause would be of a nature to require postponement. In the event, however, this expectation was not realized and as matters turned out, it became necessary for me to commit First Canadian Army with the knowledge that the Americans might not be able to intervene for at least a week.

According to existing intelligence, the C.-in-C. said that we should now assume that the enemy

disposed approximately twelve divisions opposite the three armies. There was strong evidence of strengthening opposition along my own front. He estimated that von Rundstedt could collect up to eleven Panzer and Panzer Grenadier divisions, but of these some would certainly go to the east, others would be required as a tactical reserve in front of the First U.S. Army, and he expected the remainder to resume their previous position in reserve guarding the approaches to the Ruhr.

(Ibid)

193. In appreciating the enemy's situation on the Canadian Army's front, General Crerar had excellent reason to suppose that the sector between the Maas and the Rhine was defended by the 84th Division, strongly reinforced, and that 7 Para Div remained east of the Reichswald, while he expected that 15 Pz Gr Div, which probably was in reserve, would be able to join the battle within six hours. (Ibid)

194. To the south of First Cdn Army, operations to clear the Roermond triangle had almost terminated. On 20 Jan the high ground about Bockel had been secured, and the town of Heinsberg fell on 24 Jan. By 26 Jan 12 Brit Corps had completed its task. The enemy, apart from a small bridge-head south-west of Roermond, had been flung back east of the river, and the area had been handed over to Ninth U.S. Army. (Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, pp 231 and 232). In the meantime, to the far north and west, the elaborate deception scheme to simulate a build-up for an attack by 1 Brit Corps towards Utrecht was under way. Operation "TURBINATE II", as it was called, involved the recent elimination of Kapelscheveer and a series of aggressive patrols into the enemy's territory. In addition, 15 (S.) Div and 51 (H.) Div were to concentrate in the Corps area for a short period prior to the start of "VERITABLE" and to carry out a false relief of 1 Pol and 4 Cdn Armd Divs. The artillery and other services also had important roles to play in this plan. The guns were first to carry out regular registration shoots in the areas across the Maas near Hedel, then move out by night, leaving dummy guns in positions. The engineers repaired roads all through the Corps' forward areas and the immense dumping of stores and ammunition all lent truth to the theory that a large attack was being contemplated.

195. In the area of 2 Cdn Corps, the sector of 49 (W.R.) Div was generally quiet, although there was an abundance of movement on the enemy's side of the line. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, February 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 4 Feb 45, Serials 2 and 16; and 5 Feb 45, Serial 11). Intermittent exchanges of gun and mortar fire occurred daily (Ibid, 6 Feb 45, Serials 8 and 9), while further south 3 Cdn Inf Div waited amid the heavy troop concentrations which signified the speedy end of the static period. The congestion in the Nijmegen salient was extremely severe, for besides some 200,000 troops, there were approximately 1,300 vehicles and 1000 guns. It was while this force was being collected that the level of the River Rhine underwent an abnormal change. The river rose, and most of the ground over which 3 Cdn Inf Div was to attack became flooded. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: Docket I, 3 Cdn Inf Div Monthly Consolidated Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 1-28 Feb 45). Despite this added setback, however, the general plan was not changed.

Buffaloes were to be provided for the attack. (Ibid).

196. Meanwhile 2 Cdn Inf Div was also feeling the rise in tempo as preparations for "VERITABLE" went forward. Special equipment poured into the rear areas, and on 1 Feb orders were given that no further mines or other obstruction should be laid in the forward areas. The last days of the month of January saw the usual turn-over in the front-line units. S. Sask R. relieved Camerons of C., who in turn took over from Fus M.R. on 31 Jan. The next day R.H.C. exchanged positions with Calg Highrs on the far flank, and on 2 Feb R.H.L.I. relieved R. de Mais to come under command 5 Cdn Inf Bde for operations. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4, 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 1-2 Feb 45). Enemy action was generally restricted to mortar fire, though on the afternoon of 2 Feb 5 Cdn Inf Bde was subjected to an intense rocket bombardment. This, however, was quickly subdued by counter-battery action, and no more rockets were experienced. In the meantime, as large numbers of motor transport moved over the roads in the divisional area, there was a slight thaw, which, coupled with the heavy load of traffic, played havoc with the road surfaces and aroused some concern with respect to the routes required for the forthcoming operations. (2 Cdn Inf Div Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities, 28 Jan-3 Feb 45; and Monthly Summary 1-28 Feb 45)

197. While the huge stage setting for the coming offensive was being assembled in Lt-Gen Simonds' sector, the 1 Brit Corps area, which had held the limelight with the operation against Kapelscheveer, once again lapsed into relative tranquillity. The normal patrols however, continued all along the front. On the western flank there had been some changes. While 4 Cdo Bde and 62 A.Tk Regt had little to report, 11 Hussars had arrived at Oudenbosch to take over from 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, who in turn departed eastwards to come under command of 2 Cdn Corps on 3 Feb, where they relieved 7 Cdn Recce Regt. (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 1-3 Feb 45). 41(R.M.) Cdo, now under the control of 4 Cdn Armd Div, still persisted in making their presence felt on the enemy's side by their sorties over the waters of the Maas. (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H: January - February 1945, folios 36 and 37, Sitreps, 2 Feb 45)

198. In the area Waalwijk and Heusden, the troops of 10 Cdn Inf Bde, though weary after their recent experiences on Kapelscheveer, held a firm line. In spite of the tremendous punishment that this brigade had undergone during the last days of January, its spirit was by no means dampened. Patrols from Alq R. daily kept the enemy worried, while the tanks of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt expended their ammunition most usefully in blasting every possible target on the north bank of the river. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-5 Feb 45). During the night of 6-7 Feb, in keeping with the intention to deceive the enemy regarding the approaching attack, Operation "BRIGHT EYES", a minor part of "TURBINATE II" was carried out. The enemy reaction to the firing of hundreds of Verey light and mortar flares was disappointingly blasé. (Ibid, 7 Feb 45). At the eastern end of the Corps sector elements of 4 Cdn Armd Bde and 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt maintained normal patrols without incident. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 1-7 Feb 45). The enemy's activity during the past few days had been mostly in the form of artillery and mortar fire. During the night 5/6 Feb his heavy guns poured some twenty rounds into Tilburg and 's Hertogenbosch. Apparently this effort was the result of his tactical reconnaissance, for German planes had been active over the route leading eastwards to the area of the

coming battle. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 221, 6 Feb 45, para 2)

199. By 7 Feb however, the stage was set: "VERITABLE" was about to be launched. But it was fairly clear that, although until 6 Feb the enemy could have had little knowledge of the intentions of First Cdn Army, he must have realized now that an operation of some significance was afoot. On that day, states General Crerar,

... I had to assume that his aircraft, flying over the Army area on tactical reconnaissance, had observed the unavoidable signs of our enterprise, especially in the district between Grave and Nijmegen, where the many hundreds of vehicles and tanks, many of them impossible to conceal as the only hard standings were roads and streets, could hardly have escaped the vigilance of the camera. General Student * must now have had a shrewd suspicion that I was going to attack in the Reichswald sector. He could not rule out an attack north of the Maas, but his reconnaissance was so wide-spread as to give him an accurate comparative view of activity along the whole of our front. But in surveying the enemy's problems and possibilities, I decided that there was little he could do to improve his situation as it then stood. Most of von Rundstedt's available forces were required either to remain in the south to meet the American threat from Roermond to the Ardennes, or to move to the east to fight the Russians.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45)

200. At all events the attack would go in, and

... Given favourable weather the attack was to have maximum assistance from the air. The assaulting divisions would have the support of the Second Tactical Air Force with a potential of 1,000 fighters or fighter-bombers, 100 medium day, and 90 night-fighters. Close-in support would be provided by the 84th Group, and Bomber Command would attack targets in the enemy's battle area with up to 1,000 heavy bombers. Support was also expected from the medium bombers and the heavy bombers of the Eighth U.S. Army Air Force. But given the intention to retain the greatest possible element of surprise, and as it was not to be assumed that this could be achieved if D-Day were delayed by as many as twenty-four hours, the operation would be launched if necessary, with fire support from ground weapons only. For this purpose there were over 1,400 guns, one-third of them mediums, heavies and super-heavies. The Canadian Rocket Projector Battery

* As appeared afterwards, Student was recalled to Berlin at the end of January and the Army Group was taken over by Generaloberst Blaskowitz (AEF/45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: NOTE by Lt-Col W.E.C. Harrison, Hist Sec (G.S.), C.M.H.Q., 7 Feb 46).

was also to be employed, and the infantry were to be aided in their advance by the varied equipment of the 79th British Armoured Division. Prior to the attack an intensive programme of heavy bombing was actually carried out, the chief targets being the towns of Goch and Cleve, two pivotal points in the organization of the enemy's defences.

(Ibid)

201. On 7 Feb 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs came under command 30 Brit Corps, as 30 Corps took over responsibility for the whole front east of Nijmegen. 15 (S.), 53 (W.) and 51 (H.) Divisions had moved into the areas directly behind 2 Cdn Inf Div, where they waited to pass through at H Hour. The task of 2 Cdn Inf Div in the forthcoming operation was to clear the triangle of territory south of the Nijmegen - Cleve road near Wyler. Once this key point of the enemy's first line had been seized, the Canadian division would open two roads for the use of 15 (S.) Div, who would pass through and take over the sector, allowing 2 Cdn Inf Div to go into reserve. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/I and C/F: Op Instr No. 12, 3 Feb 45). 3 Cdn Inf Div was allotted a slightly different role. Its H Hour was not to be until the evening of 8 Feb, when 7 and 8 Cdn Inf Bdes, protected by a vast smoke screen, would lunge forward in Buffaloes and Weasels to occupy the low-lying and already flooded land in the area of the railway line running north-east from Cleve to Griethausen (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F and C/I: Report on Op "VERITABLE" by Hist Offr; and Op Order and Amendment of 3 Feb 45).

202. During the night of 7/8 Feb some 900 heavy bombers effectively carried out the greater part of the pre-arranged air plan. Cleve, Goch, Weeze, Uden and Calcar took the deadly cargoes. Then at 0500 hours, as these towns blazed afire, hundreds of guns belched forth as one. "VERITABLE" had started. First Cdn Army had gone over to the offensive. (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45)

203. This report is the work of Capt J.W. Spurr, C.I.C., and Major P.A. Mayer, C.I.C. Capt Spurr wrote the first 124 paragraphs, which deal with the period 9 Nov - 31 Dec 44. Major Mayer completed the report.

S.W. Nicholson, Major
for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director Historical Section

TOP SECRET

GOC 8

Main Headquarters,
2nd Canadian Corps.

Copy No. 14.

22 November, 1944.

TO: Maj-Gen A.B. Matthews, DSO,
GOC 2 Cdn Inf Div
Maj-Gen D.C. Spry, DSO,
GOC 3 Cdn Inf Div
Maj-Gen D.A.H. Graham, CB, CBE, DSO, MC,
GOC 50 (N.) Div
Brigadier-Gen A.C. McAuliffe,
Comd 101 US Airborne Div
Brigadier J.F. Bingham,
Comd 2 Cdn Armd Bde

OPERATIONS

Ref Maps: HOLLAND, Scale 1/100,000

APPRECIATION

1. The present zone of operations of 2nd Canadian Corps is the salient enclosed by the front extending from the NORTH bank of R. MAAS by MIDDELAAR 7448 to the SOUTH bank of R. MAAS at MAREN 3757.

2. It is the most important bit of ground in the Northern half of the Western Front. It includes the NIJMEGEN bridge 7163 and the approach routes on the SOUTH and NORTH banks of the river - the only permanent bridge now in our hands which spans the main course of the R. RHINE. Military bridging of the lower reaches of the RHINE is a doubtful possibility under winter conditions. The mere possession of this passage across the river gives us the power to develop operations on either bank and constitutes a permanent threat and mental hazard to the Germans. The NIJMEGEN bridge is of the greatest importance to us and must be protected against all forms of attack.

3. Topographically and in respect to its offensive and defensive possibilities, the salient falls into three main sectors divided by the courses of the lateral river lines running through it.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| (a) " <u>THE REICHSWALD</u> " | - The area between the R. MAAS and R. RHINE (WAAL). |
| (b) " <u>THE ISLAND</u> " | - The area between the Rs. RHINE (WAAL) and NEDER RIJN. |
| (c) " <u>THE WESTERN APPROACHES</u> " | - The area extending from the SOUTH bank of the R. RHINE (WAAL) at DEEST 5768 across the junction of Rs. WAAL (RHINE) and MAAS to the SOUTH bank of the latter at MAREN. |

4. The town of NIJMEGEN, the bridge approaches on either bank of the RHINE and the reaches of the river above and below the bridges form an enclave requiring special treatment. In this area are sited the water, A.A. and ground defences required for the close protection of bridge sites

and approaches. Booms and nets must be positioned to protect bridges, against floating and underwater mines drifted down the river, swimming saboteurs, explosive motor boats and small submarines, both by day and night. A.A. guns and searchlights, and searchlights to cover booms at night must be available. Infantry and guns are required to cover booms by fire and to deal with attempts at sabotage. All these defences must be co-ordinated under a single command. Tactically the bridges are linked to the ISLAND sector for they should be controlled by the command developing operations therefrom.

"THE REICHSWALD"

5. In the REICHSWALD, though the approaches are narrow, the ground is suitable for offensive operations under all except the most adverse weather conditions. The retention of the ridge of high ground immediately WEST of the line MIDDELAAR 7448 - GROESBEEK 7555 - BEEK 7560, now in our hands, is essential to protect NIJMEGEN bridge and the Southern approach roads leading to it. Any enemy penetration in this sector threatens the communications of troops holding the bridgehead on the ISLAND and the stability of our whole position in the salient.

6. If the Germans accept battle for a decision in the WEST, WEST OF THE RHINE, our position in the REICHSWALD forms a base through which an attack could be launched between the Rs. MAAS and RHINE against the Northern flank of the German battle line.

7. This sector must be fully ensured and developed as an offensive base.

"THE ISLAND"

8. The ISLAND sector forms the immediate bridgehead covering the NIJMEGEN bridges. It is flat polder land closely covered by tree lines and hedges, intersected by ditches and dykes, and overlooked by the high ground NORTH of the NEDER RIJN. At present the Germans hold the Eastern end of the ISLAND, our forward positions running along the general line incl BEMMEL 7367 - incl ELST 7070 - thence running due NORTH along the railway line to the SOUTH bank of the NEDER RIJN in 7076 - thence along the SOUTH bank of the NEDER RIJN to both excl OPHEUSDEN 5473 and OCHTEN 5069.

9. Offensively the Germans have the advantage that a comparatively shallow penetration of our positions in the Eastern half of the ISLAND immediately threatens NIJMEGEN bridge, whilst we could sweep the whole ISLAND clear without prejudicing their defence of the REICHSWALD or IJSSEL positions. To balance this apparent advantage the Germans have no bridge behind them and are dependent upon ferrying.

10. During the wet weather the ground in most places is saturated to an extent that makes the cross-country movement of infantry difficult and of vehicles impossible. Offensive operations and movement of supporting arms must be based upon an "all-weather" road. The control of the centres of road communications is the key to the defence of the ISLAND. These centres covering the approaches to NIJMEGEN bridge must be strongly held:

BEMMEL	7367
ELST	7070
VALBERG	6670
ANDELST	6169

11. If we are to capitalize on our possession of NIJMEGEN bridge, it implies the securing of the crossing at ARNHEM 7477. This is best secured by an attack developed from an assault across the NEDER RIJN between both incl RENKUM 6276 and WAGENINGEN 5776. So long as this operation is a possibility, we must dominate this stretch of the river and here, the SOUTH bank must be held.

12. Whilst the Germans hold its Eastern end, they can, when the R. RHINE is in flood, breach the dykes and flood the ISLAND. In this event it might be necessary to evacuate the ISLAND except for a shallow bridgehead covering NIJMEGEN bridges. A limited attack to drive the Germans across the NEDER RIJN would remove this danger.

"THE WESTERN APPROACHES"

13. The WESTERN APPROACHES comprise low lying polder land covered by main courses of the WAAL and MAAS and are unsuitable for important offensive action by either side. This sector can be lightly held.

THE FLANKS

14. 8 Corps is on the RIGHT of 2nd Canadian Corps and occupies the WEST bank of the MAAS from SOUTH of CUYK 7149. This Northern end of 8 Corps front is held lightly by patrolling forces. An attack by the Germans across the MAAS from the direction of GENNEP 7746 threatens the position of 2nd Canadian Corps in the salient. Though such an operation is unlikely, given a spell of dry weather it is not an impossibility. In the event of the Germans establishing themselves WEST of the MAAS about GENNEP, the key points covering the communications of 2nd Canadian Corps in the salient are ST ANTHONIS 7138 - MILL 6444 - and CUYK 7149.

15. On the LEFT flank of 2nd Canadian Corps, 1 Brit Corps extends along the Southern bank of the MAAS where, covered by a major water obstacle, the low lying ground is unsuitable for any important offensive operation.

ENEMY DISPOSITIONS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

16. The Order of Battle and dispositions of the enemy facing the salient are detailed in Intelligence Summaries. The most likely offensives which the Germans might undertake as ripostes to attacks by the Anglo-American armies further SOUTH are thrusts through the REICHSWALD sector or in the ISLAND through BEMMEL 7367 and/or ELST 7070, directed at NIJMEGEN bridge.

POSSIBLE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS BY 2ND CANADIAN CORPS

17. There are three offensive operations which might be mounted from the NIJMEGEN salient:-

- (a) A limited attack to drive the Germans from the Eastern end of the ISLAND.
- (b) A major attack in the REICHSWALD to break through the Northern extension of the SIEGFRIED line in conjunction with the attacks by U.S. and Second British Armies further SOUTH.

- (c) A major attack across the NEDER RIJN to capture the high ground NORTH of ARNHEM and bridgeheads over the IJSSEL, the initial assault crossing being in the sector, both incl, RENKUM 6276 - WAGENINGEN 5776.

If operation (b) is carried out it will be necessary for another Corps H.Q. to assume responsibility for the ISLAND. If operation (c) is carried out it will be necessary for another Corps H.Q. to assume responsibility for the REICHSWALD. This must be taken into account in the organization and development of communications in the salient.

18. Outlines of these operations will be the subjects of separate directives. This instruction details the dispositions of the 2nd Canadian Corps to hold the salient and develop it as an offensive base.

COMPOSITION OF 2ND CANADIAN CORPS

19. 2nd Canadian Corps comprises four infantry divisions and one armoured brigade. As rotation of infantry divisions may be necessary they will be referred to in this directive as "A", "B", "C" and "D" infantry divisions and specific divisions will be detailed to sectors and tasks as the situation requires.

INTENTION

20. 2nd Canadian Corps will
- (a) Hold and develop the NIJMEGEN salient as a base for offensive operations directed South-eastwards between the MAAS and RHINE or Northwards across the NEDER RIJN.
 - (b) By patrolling, raids, and, within the limitations of ammunition allotment, offensive use of artillery, inflict casualties and undermine morale of the enemy facing us.
 - (c) Protect and maintain the NIJMEGEN bridges.

METHOD

Dispositions

The REICHSWALD

21. Will be held with "A" Inf Div (less Div Recce Regt) RIGHT and "B" Inf Div (less Div Recce Regt) LEFT. I consider each of these divisions should be positioned with two infantry brigades forward and one in reserve. For purposes of counter-attack or follow-up, each of these divisions can count upon one regiment of 2 Cdn Armd Bde being placed under command.

Tasks

22. "A" Inf Div will
- (a) Hold the sector from incl RIGHT bank of R. MAAS by MIDDELAAR to incl GROESBEEK and the spur immediately NORTH in 7555. It will, if necessary, use all its resources to

prevent the enemy establishing themselves on the high ground MOOK 7251 - PAPENBERG 7472 - HOENDERBERG 7355 - spur in 7555. GROESBEEK is of great importance as all routes in the central part of the REICHSWALD sector converge there.

- (b) Hold BUYK 7169.
- (c) Be responsible for the local protection of GRAVE bridges 6154.
- (d) By patrolling and raids inflict casualties on the enemy and dominate the position on its front.
- (e) Organize its reserve brigade so that if the Germans withdraw it can quickly follow up on the axis MOOK - GENNEP 7746 - X rds 8347 - GOCH 9043.

23. "B" Inf Div will

- (a) Hold the sector from incl ANNETTEBERG 7356 to incl SOUTH bank R. RHINE at 780630. It will, if necessary, use all its resources to prevent the enemy establishing themselves on the ridge ANNETTEBERG - BEEK 7560 or in PERSINGEN 7561 and/or OOIJ 7564.
- (b) By patrolling and raids inflict casualties on the enemy, dominate the position on its front and gain information with a view to an attack towards the WATERBORN feature 8755.

(c) Organize its reserve brigade so that if the Germans withdraw it can quickly follow up on the axis KRANENBURG 8156 - CLEVE 9055.

The ISLAND

24. Will be held with "C" Inf Div RIGHT, "D" Inf Div LEFT.

Tasks

25. "C" Inf Div will

- (a) Hold the sector from incl NORTH bank of R. RHINE at HAALDEREN 7566 to incl road at 691730 WEST of ELST. It will, if necessary, employ all its resources to prevent the enemy establishing themselves WEST of BEMMEL, 7367 or SOUTH of ELST.
- (b) Be responsible for the local defence of the NIJMEGEN bridges, including co-ordination of Naval, Engineer, A.A. Artillery and Infantry defences.
- (c) By patrolling dominate the position on the front between both incl HAALDEREN - HEUVEL 7369, with a view to an attack through this sector to clear the Germans from the ISLAND.

- (d) Develop communications with a view to the attack (c) above.
- (e) Follow up immediately with fighting patrols any enemy withdrawal from the Eastern end of the ISLAND.

26. I consider that these requirements can be fulfilled
by:-

- (a) Establishing one strong infantry brigade locality controlling all routes converging in the area of BEMMEL.
- (b) Establishing one strong infantry brigade locality controlling all routes within divisional boundary converging on ELST.
- (c) Filling the gap between localities (a) and (b) by minefields and wire obstacles watched by recce patrols.
- (d) Providing local guards for NIJMEGEN bridges from one battalion of the reserve infantry brigade.

27. If the Germans withdraw or are driven from the ISLAND, this sector could be further thinned out, but main forward positions should still be centred on BEMMEL and ELST with standing patrols protecting artillery O.Ps. on the general line of the dyke running just EAST of ANGEREN 7870 - HUISSEN 7672 ELDEN 7375.

28. "D" Inf Div will

- (a) Cover the LEFT flank of "C" Inf Div and the approaches to NIJMEGEN bridges from the NORTH and WEST by holding the sector from incl bend in road at 687746 to NORTH bank of the WAAL excl OCHTEN 5069.
- (b) By aggressive patrolling dominate the line of the river from excl DRIEL 6875 to incl bend in 5674 with a view to an assault crossing in this sector should general development of the situation so require.
- (c) Develop communications leading to and in the area HETEREN 6375 - RANDWIJK 5975 with a view to assault at (b) above.

29. I consider that these requirements can be fulfilled
by:-

- (a) Establishing one infantry brigade along the SOUTH bank of the NEDER-RIJN in the area excl DRIEL 6875 incl HETEREN 6375 excl HEMMEN 6072.
- (b) Establishing one brigade covering the convergence of communications in the area both incl HEMMEN - ANDELST with standing patrols to the Westwards.
- (c) Positioning one infantry brigade in reserve covering convergence of communications in VALBERG 6670 - HOMOET 6672.

- (d) Finding standing and recce patrols in the angle formed by the junction of the railway embankment and NEDER RIJN meeting at 706763 from the divisional recce regiment or reserve brigade.

30. Instructions regarding the evacuation of the ISLAND in the event of flooding are issued separately (Operation "NOAH"). Minimum transport will be retained on the ISLAND by "C" and "D" Divs.

The WESTERN APPROACHES

31. Will be held by divisional recce regiments of "A" and "B" Infantry Divisions grouped under command of one regimental H.Q.

CORPS RESERVE

32. 2 Cdn Armd Bde will be in Corps reserve. One regiment will be positioned EAST of the canal HEUMEN 7053 - WEURT 6684 - the brigade less one regiment WEST of the canal near the GRAVE - NIJMEGEN road.

Tasks

33. (a) To counter-attack with reserve brigades of "A" or "B" Infantry Divisions.
- (b) Decentralize one armoured regiment under command each of "A" and "B" Infantry Divisions in event of German withdrawal and follow-up by these divisions.
- (c) Be prepared to occupy in succession, each with one armoured regiment MILL 6444 and ST ANTHONIS 7138 in event Germans establish themselves WEST of the MAAS about GENNEP.

ANTI-TANK DEFENCE

34. Under conditions existing in the salient, I consider that the allotment of armoured units to back up infantry formations in a defensive role is NOT justifiable. With ample time to recce and prepare anti-tank positions, in accordance with co-ordinated plan, anti-tank defence will be based upon the anti-tank gun. I stress the importance of the following:-

- (a) Anti-tank defence in depth along all tank approaches from forward positions to divisional rear areas. Roads are of particular importance during this wet season.
- (b) Co-ordination between adjoining divisions along divisional boundaries and flanks.
- (c) Careful siting of individual guns to give defilade from the direction of tank approach.
- (d) Concealment and camouflage of anti-tank gun positions and of spoil, work and working parties during preparations.

- (e) Avoidance of movement about anti-tank gun positions in the forward area. The German organization of observation is extremely good and having spotted positions they bide their time until neutralization will best assist their plans. It is useless to carefully dig-in and camouflage gun positions, if the detachments hang out their washing on or near the guns.

35. Armoured regiments of 2 Cdn Armd Bde may be sub-allotted to divisions for local offensives or counter-attacks and Comd 2 Cdn Armd Bde will arrange necessary affiliations and liaison.

OFFENSIVE USE OF ARTILLERY

36. We have a large number of guns but little ammunition. To make the best offensive use of our artillery resources there must be centralized control and the situation within the salient lends itself to such control. I am issuing a separate directive dealing with offensive employment of our artillery and ammunition allcments.

DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF COMMUNICATIONS

37. The development and maintenance of road communications within the salient is very important from the point of view of future offensive operations - particularly on the ISLAND. The following action will be taken to minimize routine traffic in forward areas and improve routes:-

- (a) "C" and "D" Inf Divs will retain on the ISLAND only essential minimum of fighting and local maintenance vehicles. All vehicles not really required forward will be kept in DMAs SOUTH of the WAAL (RHINE).
- (b) Corps FMC will be located SOUTH of the MAAS in the area of OSS 4754.
- (c) DMA of "A" Inf Div will be located SOUTH of the MAAS.
- (d) To cover a temporary interruption of traffic across main bridges the following dumps will be established:-
- (i) On the ISLAND - Two days supplies for all troops on the ISLAND.
- 5,000 gals POL.
 - 100 rpg field and medium for all guns sited on the ISLAND.
- (ii) Between WAAL and MAAS
- Four days supplies for all troops in the salient.
 - 200,000 gals POL.
 - 150 rpg field and 100 rpg medium artillery ammunition for all guns sited NORTH of R. MAAS.

These will be additional to reserve supplies normally held in formation echelons. These dumps will NOT be drawn upon unless traffic

across the bridge is interrupted.

- (e) All units will assist in road maintenance within their areas. This work will be co-ordinated through Engineer channels.
- (f) The programme of Corps routes to be developed will be issued by CE, 2nd Canadian Corps.

TRAINING FOR THE OFFENSIVE

38. Though weather and resources limit the scope of offensive operations for the present, it is vitally important that the offensive spirit should be maintained and enhanced. Full advantage must be taken of static conditions to have the maximum number of troops out on active training. Great opportunities are now open to properly absorb reinforcements and re-weld battle teams. Aggressive patrolling against the enemy is the best schooling in junior leadership.

CORPS H.Q.

39. I will make my Main Corps H.Q. in WIJCHEN 6158.

ACKNOWLEDGE

(G.G. Simonds)
Lieut-General
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps.

Time of Signature 1000 hrs

Copies to:




General H.D.G. Crerar, CB, DSO,
GOC-in-C First Cdn Army
Lieut-General Sir R.N. O'Connor, KCB, DSO, MC,
GOC 8 Corps
Lieut-General Sir John Crocker, KCB, CBE, DSO, MC,
GOC 1 Brit Corps
Brigadier N.E. Rodger,
C. of S. HQ 2 Cdn Corps
Lieut-Col A.F.B. Knight,
A/DA & QMG HQ 2 Cdn Corps
Brigadier P.A.S. Todd, OBE,
CCRA HQ 2 Cdn Corps
Brigadier S.F. Clark,
CSO HQ 2 Cdn Corps
File
War Diary
Spares

ALLIED & ENEMY DISPOSITIONS

(NORTHERN SECTOR)
0600 HRS 9 NOV 44

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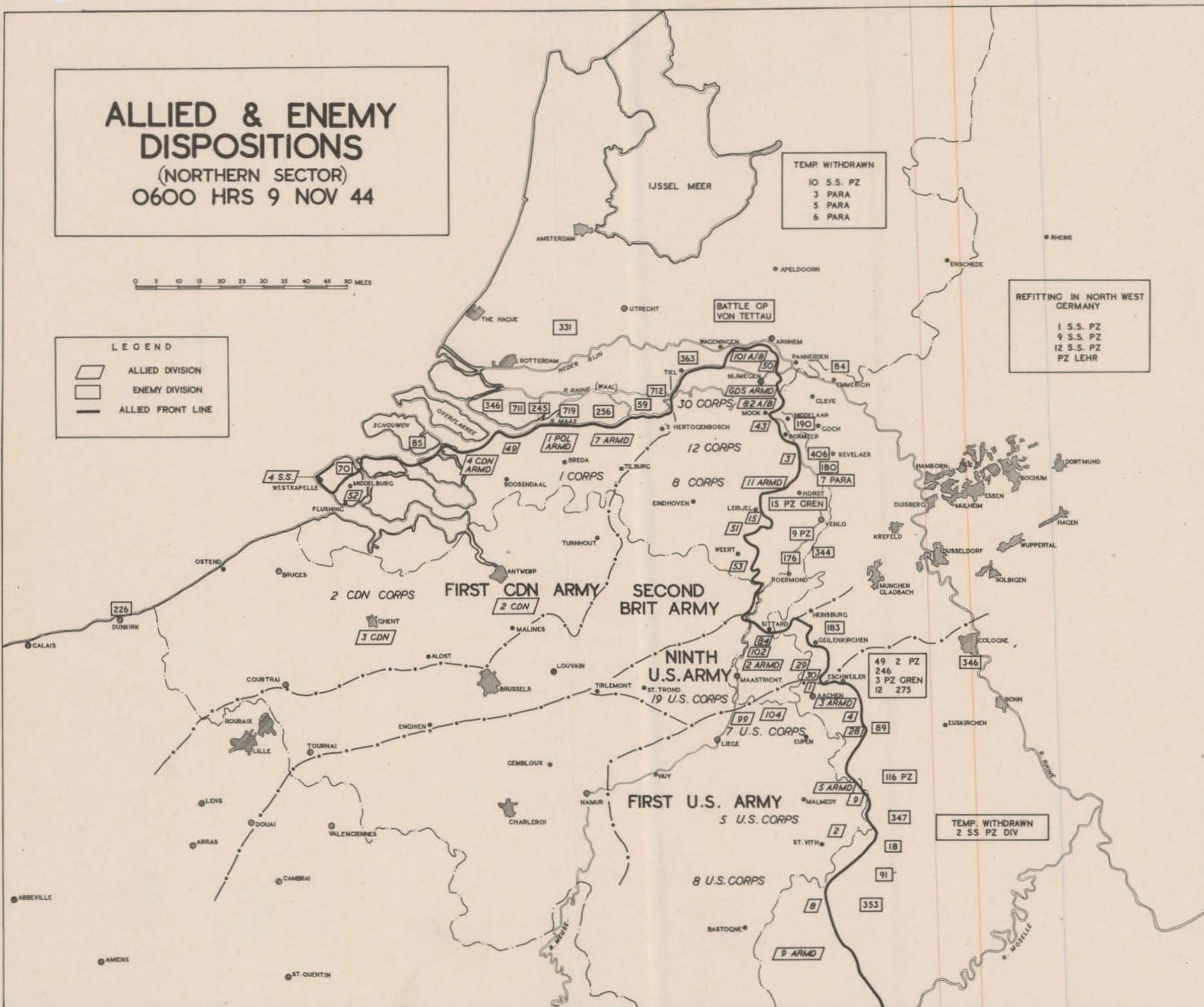
LEGEND

-  ALLIED DIVISION
-  ENEMY DIVISION
-  ALLIED FRONT LINE

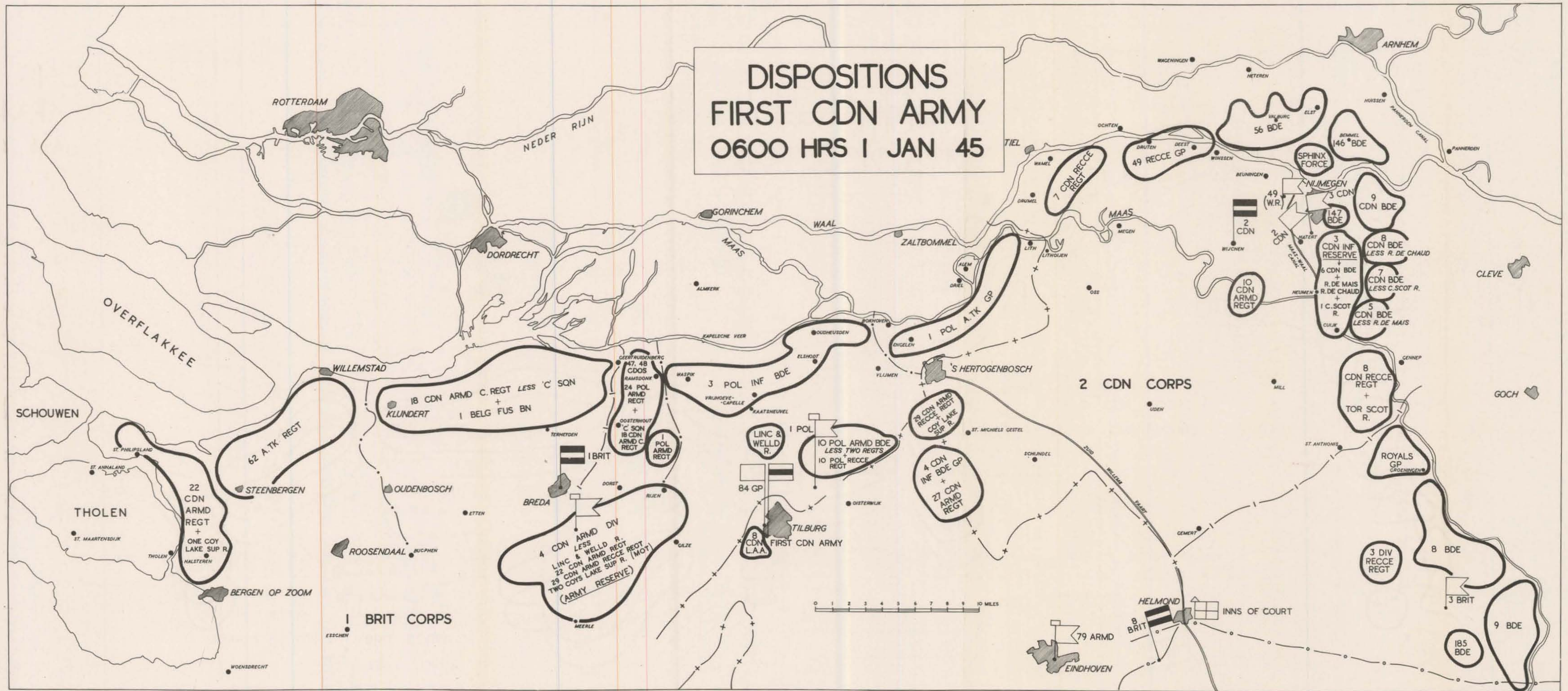
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10 S.S. PZ
3 PARA
5 PARA
6 PARA

REFITTING IN NORTH WEST GERMANY
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9 S.S. PZ
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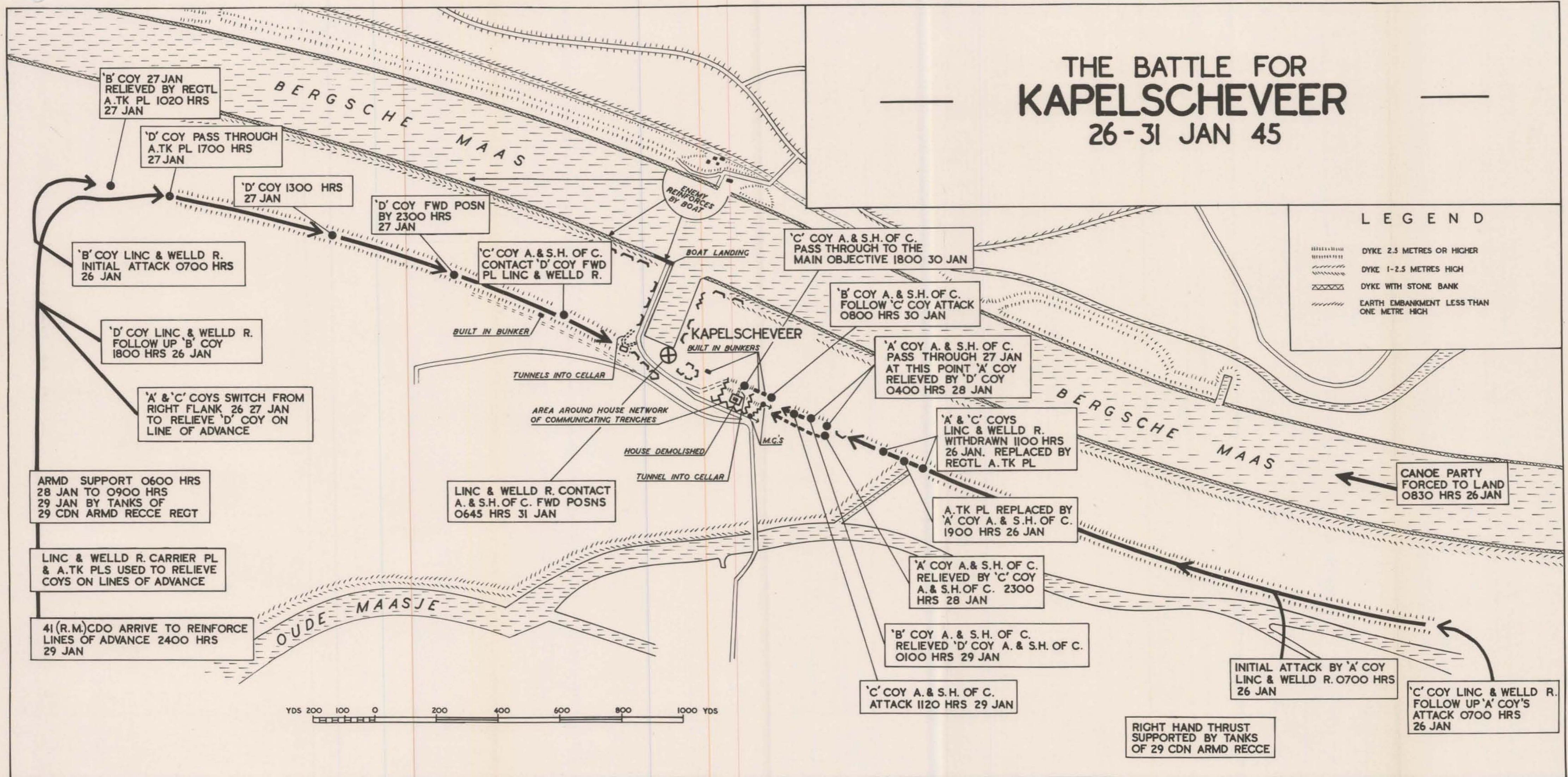
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2 SS PZ DIV



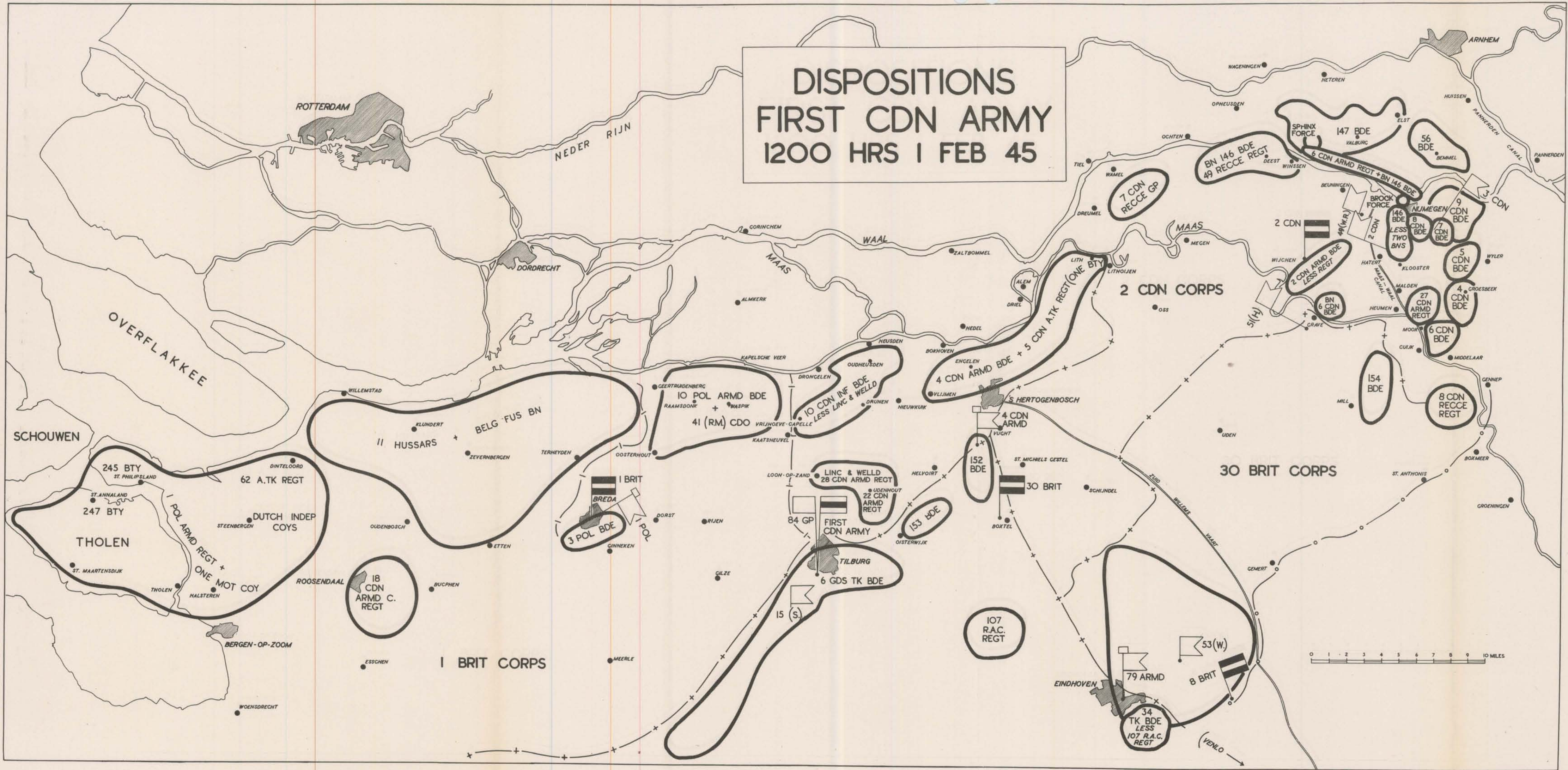
DISPOSITIONS FIRST CDN ARMY 0600 HRS 1 JAN 45



THE BATTLE FOR KAPELSCHEVEER 26-31 JAN 45



DISPOSITIONS FIRST CDN ARMY 1200 HRS 1 FEB 45



ROTTERDAM

NEDER RIJN

DORDRECHT

CORINCHEM

WAAL

MAAS

ZALTBOMMEL

MAAS

2 CDN CORPS

2 CDN CORPS

30 BRIT CORPS

SCHOUWEN

OVERFLAKKEE

THOLEN

BELG FUS BN

11 HUSSARS

10 POL ARMD BDE

41 (RM) CDO

10 CDN INF BDE
LESS LINC & WELLD

4 CDN ARMD BDE + 5 CDN A.TK REGT (ONE BTY)

LINC & WELLD
28 CDN ARMD REGT

22 CDN ARMD REGT

FIRST CDN ARMY

6 GDS TK BDE

3 POL BDE

18 CDN ARMD C. REGT

1 BRIT CORPS

107 R.A.C. REGT

79 ARMD

8 BRIT

34 TK BDE
LESS
107 R.A.C. REGT

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MILES

ARNHEM

WAGNINGEN

HETEREN

HUISSEN

PANNEKOEN CANAL

PANNERDEN

OPHEUSDEN

OCHTEN

TIEL

WAMEL

DREUMEL

DEEST

WINNEN

SPHINX FORCE

147 BDE

VALBURG

56 BDE

5 CDN ARMD REGT + BN 146 BDE

BN 146 BDE
49 RECCE REGT

7 CDN

BEUNINGEN

BROCK FORCE

146 BDE

8 CDN BDE

7 CDN BDE

2 CDN

49 (W.R.)

2 CDN

2 CDN ARMD BDE
LESS REGT

5 CDN BDE

WIJCHEN

HATERT

MAAS

KLOOSTER

5 CDN BDE

51(H)

BN 6 CDN BDE

HEUMEN

27 CDN ARMD REGT

4 CDN BDE

CRAVE

MOON

6 CDN BDE

4 CDN BDE

51(H)

154 BDE

8 CDN RECCE REGT

51(H)

GENNEP

30 BRIT

ST. ANTHONIS

BOXMEER

51(H)

MILL

GROENINGEN

51(H)

UDEN

ST. MICHIELS GESTEL

30 BRIT

SCHIJNDEL

51(H)

BOXTEL

152 BDE

153 BDE

51(H)

ST. MICHIELS GESTEL

30 BRIT

SCHIJNDEL

51(H)

VUGHT

4 CDN ARMD

5 HERTOGENBOSCH

51(H)

HEUSDEN

ENGELN

4 CDN ARMD BDE + 5 CDN A.TK REGT (ONE BTY)

51(H)

BOKHOFEN

HEUSDEN

4 CDN ARMD

51(H)

NEDEL

4 CDN ARMD

5 HERTOGENBOSCH

51(H)

HEUSDEN

4 CDN ARMD

5 HERTOGENBOSCH

51(H)

HEUSDEN

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